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## FOREWORD

I HAVE attempted in this little book to draw a character sketch and, in a general way, to evaluate the services of the Presidents of the United States from 1789 to the present time. A study of this kind appeals to me as important for several reasons. In the first place, the President of the United States is the most powerful executive officer in the world. Important and extensive powers were placed in his hands by the Constitutional Convention of 1787 and these powers have gradually increased and expanded since that time. By virtue of his office, the President also exerts a profound influence over many subjects to which his legal and constitutional authority does not extend. His views and his attitude are weighty considerations in world affairs. His utterances are noted with interest both at home and abroad. Owing to the far-reaching importance of the office, the selec-

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tion of a President is the most important single act which the people of the United States are called upon to perform. It is therefore interesting and instructive to note the degree of success with which we have met this responsibility. It is also well to review and to analyze the methods and principles involved in the selection of a President with a view to their possible improvement. It might be that better results could be obtained with a change in methods of selection and with an altered attitude toward the Presidency.

This book is a new edition, revised and considerably enlarged, of a book published under the same title several years ago. The subject has grown in magnitude and significance since the first edition was published and facilities for its treatment have likewise been amplified. The letters and papers of the Presidents, as well as numerous other historical documents which have come to light in recent years have made it possible to treat the subject at this time with greater com-

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pleteness and certitude than was formerly possible.

The Americans are a busy people but they cannot afford to neglect the fundamentals of their government. Democracy, in its present form, the world over, is still on trial.

THOMAS F. MORAN.

February, 1928.



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# AMERICAN PRESIDENTS

## CHAPTER I

### FROM WASHINGTON TO JACKSON

*Beyond any legally defined authority the President of the United States has great weight in government through his general influence on public sentiment. . . . A great part of the President's authority comes from this immense personal prestige.*

ALBERT BUSHNELL HART.

### THE PRESIDENCY

THE President of the United States is the most powerful executive officer in the world. The presidential office was created by the Constitutional Convention of 1787 and has steadily increased in power and influence since that time. James Bryce remarked forty years ago that "Abraham Lincoln wielded more authority than any single Englishman since Oliver Cromwell." He also said, in the same connection, that "the President (of the

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United States) enjoys more authority, if less dignity, than a European king."

If these statements were true four decades ago they are eminently true at the present moment. The Constitution conferred vast powers and a wide discretion upon the President and these powers have increased with the passing years. The President has never been a figurehead, but his power and prestige have never been so great as in recent times. The increase in presidential power has been particularly marked since the United States emerged from its "splendid isolation" and assumed the rôle of a world power. The policies and opinions of the American President are now matters of interest and importance far beyond the confines of his own country.

We need not stop to inquire at this time whether great occasions produce great men or great men produce great occasions. The truth probably is that each reacts upon the other. The man exalts the occasion and the occasion offers the man an opportunity for the display of his talents. It is certainly true

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that the Presidency has afforded a field for achievement for men who, in other circumstances, would probably have remained "mute, inglorious Miltons."

The Presidents have been a significant, but not a determining factor, in our national progress. They have not fixed the line and the order of the development of American civilization but they have influenced that development—some of them to a marked degree. As a result of this fact, their personal traits and characteristics, their individualities, and their peculiar contributions to American progress are matters both of interest and of importance. An evaluation of these elements should make for a better understanding of American history.

In a "presidential year" these matters assume an unusual importance. All phases of the presidential office are passed in review. The qualifications of the various candidates are subjected to a microscopical examination. The glare of publicity is merciless and relentless. The "white light that beats upon a

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throne" is dim in comparison. A well known feature writer remarked not long since that one of the candidates for a presidential nomination lacked in a marked degree the essential attributes of the typical President of the United States. I wondered at the time who this typical President might be. Would he be the dignified Washington, the graceful Pierce, the sympathetic Lincoln, the stubborn Johnson, the intellectual Benjamin Harrison, the lovable McKinley, or the cool and calculating Calvin Coolidge? Or might he possibly be no one of these but only an imaginary composite character who never in reality occupied the presidential chair at all? A quest for the typical President would, in all probability, prove fruitless, as far as immediate results are concerned, but a study of the personal traits and individual characteristics of the twenty-nine men who have occupied the presidential chair in the last hundred and thirty-nine years ought to be an interesting one. In making such a study one cannot fail to be impressed with the great variety of the per-

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sonalities and abilities of the American Presidents. There is no monotony in the panorama.

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The first President of the United States has always stood as the personification of dignity, poise, and sound judgment. He was not as eloquent as Patrick Henry, as scholarly as James Madison, or as brilliant as Alexander Hamilton; yet as a useful public man he excelled all three. His substantial qualities in statesmanship were recognized as early as 1774. He was a member of the First Continental Congress which met in Philadelphia in September of that year. Patrick Henry was also a member. Upon his return home Henry was asked whom he considered the greatest man in the assembly. His reply was: "If you speak of eloquence, Mr. Rutledge, of South Carolina, is by far the greatest orator; but if you speak of solid information and sound judgment, Colonel Washington is unquestionably the greatest man on the floor." This statement represents the view of his con-



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temporaries as well as the judgment of historians. By his good sense and rare mental poise he dominated public affairs in a quiet, all-pervasive, and exceedingly effective manner.

Washington's unusual physical strength and impressive personal appearance were valuable assets to him as surveyor, soldier and statesman. Even while young in years he was mature in both body and mind. The surveyor of seventeen was a sturdy and self-reliant lad. The young frontiersman of twenty-one commended himself to Governor Dinwiddie, of Virginia, as the proper man to carry the famous message of warning to the French after other men had failed. "Here is the very man for you," said Lord Fairfax to the Governor; "young, daring, and adventurous, but yet sober-minded and responsible, who only lacks opportunity to show the stuff that is in him." Washington met every expectation. He carried the message from Williamsburg, Virginia, to Fort Le Boeuf in northwestern Pennsylvania, and

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placed it in due time in the hands of General St. Pierre. He then returned to Virginia with the reply of the French commander, having travelled seven hundred and fifty miles in the dead of winter through unbroken forests and over rivers rough with floating ice. The tact and endurance which he displayed on this journey augured well for his future achievements. "From that moment," said Washington Irving, "he was the rising hope of Virginia" --and, he might have added, of the entire country.

When, at the age of forty-three, he was chosen Commander-in-Chief of the Continental army and appeared before Congress, modestly but unflinchingly, to accept the trust, he must have "looked the part." "Mankind," said Senator Lodge, "is impressed by externals, and those who gazed upon Washington in the streets of Philadelphia felt their courage rise and their hearts grow strong at the sight of his virile, muscular figure as he passed before them on horseback, stately, dignified, and self-contained. The people

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looked upon him, and were confident that this was a man worthy and able to dare and do all things."

Nature had been kind to him. She had endowed him with great physical strength and a rare personal presence. He was six feet two inches tall and weighed over two hundred pounds. His ordinary shoes were number eleven and his military boots two sizes larger. His hands were so large that he was obliged to have his gloves made to order. He was Egyptian in his massiveness. Houdon, the sculptor, speaks of the "majesty and grandeur of Washington's form and features;" and "every one who met him told of the commanding presence, the noble person, the ineffable dignity, and the calm, simple and stately manners. No man ever left Washington's presence without a feeling of reverence and respect amounting almost to awe."<sup>1</sup>

In his mental as well as in his physical make-up Washington was a symmetrical and well-developed character. He was so well

<sup>1</sup> Lodge, *George Washington*, Volume II, pp. 379-80.

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rounded and so nicely balanced that to some he seemed commonplace. No greater mistake could be made. He was not dramatic, spectacular, or sensational in any sense, but he was far removed from mediocrity. His judgment was rarely at fault. He was usually very slow in coming to a conclusion but when once he had done so he maintained his position "with a courage as fine and true as that of Sir Galahad of old." He was substantial, dependable, and circumspect. His appeal was to the intellect rather than to the emotions. As the "great silent man" of his time he influenced public opinion by means of his example and his writings, rather than through the medium of the spoken word. He was not a speech-maker; and yet he swayed and moved men.

Too big and broad for State lines, he became the personification of American nationalism. Matthew Arnold and Goldwin Smith have called Washington an Englishman, but to my mind he was a thorough American. He was, in fact, one of the first men in the country to

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lay aside colonialism and to grasp the national spirit. He saw as clearly as anyone and more clearly than most men that the salvation of his country lay in national unity. In working out this national unity he turned his face away from Europe and toward the New World. He was distinctly an American—a different type from Lincoln but none the less truly American. While his background was undoubtedly British, the character of his mature manhood was molded by his American environment. He was graduated from the same great training school of the frontier which, at a later time, produced such rugged exponents of American nationalism as Andrew Jackson and Abraham Lincoln.

His spiritual nature was in entire harmony with his mental and physical being. He was confident, not harassed by doubts, and had no tendency toward the sensational in religion. He was a vestryman in the Protestant Episcopal Church, and the dignified service of the Anglican worship, with its stately liturgy and beautiful forms, was to him both appealing

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and satisfying. He was practical rather than mystical in his religious conceptions, and in this matter, as in everything else, had a way of looking facts squarely and concretely in the face.

The reading public has always had a fairly adequate and correct comprehension of the official side of Washington's character; but his private life and personal traits have, until a comparatively recent time, been more or less veiled in mystery. "Gen. Washington," remarked Professor McMaster, "is known to us, and President Washington. But George Washington is an unknown man." Many of the impressions, too, which the public had formed of Washington as a man were based upon mistaken notions. Mason Weems, of hatchet and cherry-tree fame, represented him as a faultless and insipid prig; Professor McMaster speaks of his "cold heart;" to Colonel Ingersoll he was "a steel engraving;" and to Carlyle, "a Cromwell with the juice squeezed out." It was his misfortune, as Senator Lodge has remarked, to be "lifted high up

## FROM WASHINGTON TO JACKSON

into a lonely greatness, and unconsciously put outside the range of human sympathy." By means of recent investigations, however, the life story of Washington has been humanized. The veil which had hitherto concealed the private man has been, in part at least, drawn aside, and it is now seen that Washington was "fed by the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer" as other mortals were. In some respects he was intensely human. He had a weakness for gold lace, silk stockings, and silver spangles. His liking for fine feathers never quite forsook him. He was still dancing at sixty-four; he was fond of the theater; and his wine cellar at Mount Vernon was not usually empty. He liked a good horse race and often entered his own animals, placing a modest bet on the outcome. While a Virginia planter he occasionally went fox hunting on Sunday, and more than once he complained that while attending church on the Sabbath morning he

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was compelled to listen to some very "lame discourses." Neither was he immune from those plebeian diseases which now harass mankind. He suffered, at different times, from measles, smallpox, malaria, and toothache; and late in life he solemnly put it on record that his false teeth were a misfit.

He also did some things which would have given the good Parson Weems a nervous shock. At Kip's Landing, when the troops were not behaving themselves to his liking, he expressed himself in language about as stormy and violent as the mother tongue is capable of. And again at Monmouth, when he found Lee's army retreating, General Scott tells us that he "swore like an angel from heaven,"—however that may be.

In affairs of the heart he was likewise human. While still a school boy, for example, he loved to romp with one of the largest girls, and the affair became serious forthwith; at the age of sixteen he wrote in passionate strains of a certain young lady whom he called his "Low Land Beauty"; and be it



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said that this "Low Land Beauty" may have been Miss Lucy Grimes or Miss Mary Bland or Miss Betsy Fauntleroy,—so impartially did the young lover bestow his attentions. No one of them could claim a monopoly of his favor, and the identity of the young lady in question has never been disclosed.

After retiring from one of his campaigns in the Old French War he very readily and willingly capitulated at another "Fort Necessity," and the fair charmer in this case is again rather vaguely referred to as "Mrs. Neil." A little later, and at this time he was only twenty-four, he is said to have lost his heart to Mary Philipse, only to be rejected in favor of Lieutenant-Colonel Roger Morris. During the Revolution Morris was a Tory and fled from the country for safety. Let us hope, for the sake of poetic justice, that Washington had the pleasure of speeding the parting guest while he was en route, let us say, to Halifax. However that may be, the wounds which were made by the beauty of

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Mary Philipse upon the heart of the ardent suitor were only superficial, and two years later we find him at the feet of Mrs. Martha Dandridge Custis, widow of a wealthy Virginia planter whose demise had occurred only seven short moons before. The courtship was, in military language, short, sharp, and decisive, and resulted in an engagement in about three weeks. Owing to the stern necessities of the War the marriage was deferred a few months, which seemed an interminable period to the two persons most intimately concerned. Washington was now but twenty-six years of age, but was, it would seem, rich in experience in matters pertaining to courtship; for, in addition to the instances already mentioned, there were several other maidens of the time who received coy glances and side-long looks from this dashing young Virginia Cavalier. Taking it all in all, it must be admitted, I think, that the "Father of his Country" did possess some few traits and personal characteristics not ordinarily exhibited by steel engravings or by Cromwells

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with the juice squeezed out. Washington himself was not deceived in these matters, if the world was. "That I have foibles," he said, "and perhaps many of them, I shall not deny. I should esteem myself, as the world would, vain and empty, were I to arrogate perfection."

Two biographies of Washington have recently appeared which have attracted wide attention and no little adverse comment. One of these is by Rupert Hughes, the well-known novelist and playwright. Mr. Hughes would do away with the "pallid, plaster saint" and present a "vivid portrait" of Washington as he really existed. He would "let Washington tell his own story as fully as possible in his own words." In other words, he relies quite largely upon quotations from Washington's *Diaries* and other writings, and draws his own somewhat peculiar inferences from them. "The *Diaries*," he says, "are a sort of prose Bucolics. The things he noted are the index of his character. A simpler, more realistic, more comfortable, prosy, workaday man could not be imagined.

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“There is nothing less godlike than his summing-up of each day in this autobiography of his.”

To use such documents as these in the preparation of a biography is a perfectly proper and obvious thing to do, but no trained historian would use them as Mr. Hughes has done. In the first place, the *Diaries* and other papers of Washington, naturally enough, do not contain the material for a complete biography. They are, to a certain extent, as Mr. Hughes says, “an index of his character”; but they contain no adequate account of his marked civil and military achievements. The fact that he set down in his account book the cost of repairing a hairpin for one of the women of his household is indicative, in a small way, of his precise business methods; but it throws no light upon his military skill or his statesmanlike qualities. No modest and sincere man can fully reveal himself through the medium of his own writings. The materials for this phase of his biography must be sought elsewhere. Here the

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outside and detached point of view must be enlisted. It is to be hoped that Mr. Hughes will supply this deficiency in the second volume of his biography.

In the second place, citations from historical documents should be so made as to present a symmetrical and well rounded picture of the historical event or personage, and not simply to prove a thesis. This is the fundamental weakness in Mr. Hughes' method. In his narrative the novelist and the dramatist, rather than the historian, are uppermost. The ruling passion in his career asserts itself. The dramatic instinct unconsciously predominates. Citations are made and inferences are drawn apparently for their dramatic effect rather than for purposes of correct historical exposition. More representative citations and less strained interpretations would have resulted in a truer, if less spectacular, biography.

The biography by W. E. Woodward is somewhat similar in purpose and character. It is iconoclastic and cynical and seeks to belittle

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Washington and his achievements at every turn. It does not like his rhetoric and his spelling is atrocious. He was without any real religious feeling and his vanity was all but intolerable. His "luck" was always with him but his achievements were of small value. "Washington had the inestimable faculty of being able to say nothing . . . Washington was a one-bottle man . . . Washington's part in shaping the Constitution was negligible . . . He seems to have been principally a figure-head and a symbol. He was almost as impersonal at the top of the government as a statue on the top of a monument . . . The *Farewell Address* was not written by Washington, but by Hamilton . . . It is narrow in its scope" and the credit, if any, belongs to Hamilton, although Washington offered some suggestions in regard to its content. The *Address* is also severely criticised for what it omits. It says nothing about slavery and not a word about "the basic rights of men." This criticism is rather ungracious, to say the least.

## FROM WASHINGTON TO JACKSON

The book is not strictly biographical. It is discursive. The narrative wanders all around Robin Hood's barn and discusses everything from turkeys and wild honey to "bundling" and the breeding of dogs. Several other patriots of the time, aside from Washington, are exhibited wrong-side-out.

Both books are derogatory in character and the main difficulty with each lies in a misplaced emphasis. Many of the statements which have aroused indignant protest are undoubtedly true. The facts cannot be controverted, but the error lies in their undue exaltation and their peculiar interpretation. The real, the true, and the characteristic George Washington, to my mind, was the man who led the way to American independence and who, as President, guided the Republic in its infancy for eight years. Whether or not he stepped the stately minuet or followed the hounds in the chase are matters of small moment. He may have had a recipe "for brewing something to quiet the nerves." He certainly had one for quieting the nerves of the

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Nation and inspiring confidence during the "Critical Period." Washington was at his best in the Constitutional Convention of 1787. He was the one indispensable man in that august body, and the fact that he spelled "cat" with two t's doesn't matter much.

Mr. Hughes and Mr. Woodward bent to their tasks with all the zeal of new converts, but they are rather too quick on the trigger. They claim too much. Mr. Hughes remarks: "My incessant effort in this biography has been to see his life as he saw it. All other biographers have tacitly assumed that he knew the future and builded himself grandly for it." I am sure that most of the recent biographers of Washington at any rate would disclaim any such assumption.

Mr. Woodward's publishers assure us that "from the book there emerges a figure that the reader is bound to feel is the real George Washington at last, freed of the glamorous fiction with which romantic historians have invested him." Mr. Woodward has made no



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new discovery. He has not revealed to us "the real George Washington at last." The late Paul L. Ford did that very thing more than thirty years ago in his admirable book entitled, *The True George Washington*.

There was at one time a crying need for a sane, sensible, and correct biography of Washington. Following in the wake of Mason Weems there paraded a whole race of sentimentalists who, without regard to historical fact, smothered Washington with senseless eulogy. The reaction, however, set in a long time ago and is now going, apparently, to absurd lengths. It is usually true that the suppression of one evil is followed by the temporary ascendancy of the opposite one. The pendulum swings to the opposite extremity of the arc. Following this general tendency, these two books, carried by inertia, have gone to the other extreme. They have overshot the mark. Derogatory biographical writing is now the order of the day. It is the vogue of the period. It is one phase of the jazz era. It is presumed to indicate a rare

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insight and a deep erudition on the part of the biographer.

Notwithstanding these defects the books will serve a useful purpose. They contain a large amount of information, they are exceedingly well written, they will stimulate a new interest in Washington's personality and achievements, and they will serve as a corrective upon the senseless eulogists of other days. In addition to all this they offer a challenge to us to find a reason for the faith that is within us. Taken by and large, they do not deserve the senseless tirade which has been made against them in some quarters. The authors are competent writers and honest men and have a right to their own opinions. The late war injected a spirit of intolerance into our American life which is as illogical as it is blighting. Intolerance is the antithesis of intellectual growth. It is withering and astringent. All history shows its futility. America is the last place in the world in which such a spirit should thrive. We can point out that the citations made by these writers are

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not representative and we can take issue with their inferences and conclusions without getting excited or becoming abusive.

In connection with the rather off-hand and disparaging verdict of these two writers it might be well to note the estimates of two men who, from the standpoint of historical achievement, have a right to be heard in such a case as this. Doctor David S. Muzzey, one of the most incisive and discriminating of present-day historians, expresses himself as follows: "Far less creative than Hamilton and far less learned than Jefferson, without Franklin's wit or Henry's eloquence, Washington was still the acknowledged master of them all in the superb balance of deed and thought, of reason and action, with which he pursued his even way in all vicissitudes of fortune. Most men as courageous would have been precipitate in action; most men as deliberate would have been vacillating in counsel. But Washington was equally removed from exaltation and despair." William E. H. Lecky remarks that "of all the great men in

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history, he was the most invariably judicious."

It should also be said in passing that the appointment of committees to defend the name and to bolster up the reputation of Washington is a work of supererogation. Washington needs no defense. His place in history is secure. Let us not break a butterfly on a wheel or unlimber our heavy artillery on slight provocation. Why should we erect a barrier against a puny wave of opinion which will soon spend itself on a wall of granite? The world has made up its mind about Washington. After the lapse of more than a century, and with the returns all in, thinking and well-informed people are disposed, notwithstanding Lowell's flight in the famous "Commemoration Ode," to rank George Washington as the "first citizen" of the American Republic. He still remains, in the words of "Light-Horse Harry" Lee, "First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen."

## FROM WASHINGTON TO JACKSON

### JOHN ADAMS

In making the transition from Washington to John Adams, the presidential curve dips sharply downward. Adams was a peculiar man, strongly individualistic both in appearance and in character. He has been described as being of "middle height, vigorous, florid, and somewhat corpulent, quite like the typical John Bull." There was little apparently in his Anglican style of architecture to commend him to the patriots of the Revolutionary days, but in his talents and disposition there was much.

Adams was a native of Massachusetts and was graduated from Harvard College in 1755 at the age of twenty. He was as unlike his predecessor in office as a man could well be. There can be little in common in any circumstances between the Puritan of New England and the Cavalier of Virginia. In this case there was practically nothing. The whole background of their lives was different. Their viewpoints also differed in many respects.

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Washington was a surveyor and farmer, while Adams was a school teacher and lawyer. Washington was a soldier, while Adams came from civil life. Washington's school education was limited and he never went to college at all; Adams had been well educated in both preparatory school and college. In religion Washington was orthodox, while Adams was inclined to free thinking. Socially, Washington was of the aristocracy of the Old Dominion, while the Adams family held a middle rank in Massachusetts. The names of the students of Harvard College at this time were arranged in the catalogue in the order of the social standing of their parents and the young Adams stood fourteenth in a class of twenty-four on this basis.

In taste, temperament, and tact, also, they were widely separated. Senator Maclay, a contemporary, once remarked of Washington, "The President's amiable deportment smooths and sweetens everything." Adams, on the other hand, quarrelled with almost all of his associates in public life. He uttered

## FROM WASHINGTON TO JACKSON

petty and spiteful things about Washington, and the Federalist party was not big enough to contain himself and Hamilton at the same time. He looked with contempt upon Jefferson and his whole philosophy of government; he abused Franklin and spoke of his "extreme indolence and dissipation," and he peremptorily dismissed some of the members of his cabinet from office. He was particularly vindictive toward his Secretary of State, Timothy Pickering, whom he characterized as "envious of every superior," "impatient of obscurity," and deceptive "under the simple appearance of a bald head and straight hair." In most of these cases there was, to be sure, provocation enough. Hamilton had intrigued against him more than once in an underhanded and unpardonable way and as for Mr. Pickering, he was well-nigh impossible. John T. Morse refers to him as "the stiff-backed and opinionated old Puritan, full of fight and immutable in the conviction of his own righteousness."

John Adams's was a strangely compounded

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character. One of his biographers speaks of him as the "blunt and irascible old John Adams." He was all of this and a good deal more. Combined with statesmanship of the highest order and an unsurpassed personal integrity we find the most glaring and even ridiculous defects of character. He was vain and conceited to a most absurd degree—a fact which he was shrewd enough to recognize and honest enough to admit. "Vanity, I am sensible," he said, "is my cardinal vice and cardinal folly." Intimately associated with his vanity was his jealousy; and strangely enough he was jealous of Washington most of all. In a recurrent mood of churlishness he exclaimed: "Would Washington ever have been commander of the Revolutionary Army or President of the United States if he had not married the rich widow of Mr. Custis?" Again in speaking of the battle of Saratoga he said he was truly grateful "that the glory of turning the tide of arms" was "not immediately due to the Commander-in-Chief. . . . If it had, idolatry and adulation would



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have been unbounded." When Washington was the central figure of interest at the inauguration of Adams, the latter was consumed with jealousy and again let fall some foolish and childish expressions. It was also said that in the early morning of March 4, 1801, he drove quietly out of the city of Washington in order that he might not be compelled to witness the triumph of Jefferson, his successful adversary, and to extend to him the customary greeting. We must acquit him on this count, however, as he had a very good reason for not being present.

However, in spite of the fact that Adams was at times impetuous, hot-headed, vain, conceited, sensitive, dogmatic, combative, and opinionated, he was, at the same time, a true patriot and a statesman of high order. The storms of his passion, though sometimes violent, were not of long duration, and never served to obscure his vision for any considerable length of time. His indignation, too, was usually a righteous one. He was energetic, sensible, and practical, and so method-

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ical in his business affairs that Franklin seemed to him to be lazy on account of the latter's apparent lack of all method. In speech he was direct, frank, and refreshingly outspoken. Never ingenuous, always clear and incisive in his utterances, there was no mistaking his attitude. There was no Machiavellianism, no trimming, no playing to the galleries, and no attempt at carrying water on both shoulders.

His writings were equally crisp, pungent, and forceful. There was much truth in his honest commentary upon the religion of his day. "Where," said he, "do we find a precept in the gospel requiring ecclesiastical synods, convocations, councils, decrees, creeds, confessions, oaths, subscriptions, and whole cart-loads of other trumpery that we find religion encumbered with in these days?"

In politics he was equally honest and direct, and was, moreover, usually correct in his attitude, as subsequent events have shown. As a foreign minister he was dignified, industrious and effective. As a member of the Continen-

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tal Congress he was a hard-fisted, rough-and-ready fighter for what seemed to him to be right.

As a lawyer he was equally courageous. In 1770 he was asked to defend Captain Preston who had charge of the British soldiers in the so-called Boston Massacre. With a keen sense of equity and a high sense of professional duty he accepted the task because he felt that in an Anglo-Saxon court of justice every man should have a fair and an impartial trial with the benefit of counsel for his defense. He undertook the defense and secured the acquittal of Preston, although he well knew the popular clamor which his course would arouse. He never wavered in his view of the moral aspects of this engagement. A few years later he said: "It was one of the most gallant, manly, and disinterested actions of my whole life, and one of the best pieces of service I ever rendered to my country." Charles Francis Adams concurred in this view when he said that he regarded the participation in this trial "as constituting one

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of the four great moral trials and triumphs marking his grandfather's career."

When the Declaration of Independence was under discussion in Congress Adams was the foremost figure on the floor. Jefferson, in gratitude and admiration, called him the "Colossus of that debate," and Stockton saw in him the "Atlas of Independence." He did strike telling blows and did it, for the most part, unconsciously. As John T. Morse has remarked: "His intense earnestness, his familiarity with every possible argument, compelled him to be magnificently eloquent."

The principal event of his administration was the trouble with France, popularly known as the X. Y. Z. Affair. In this matter also he proved himself to be a courageous, patriotic, and far-sighted man. He represented the spirit of the nation and of the times when he wrote, after the shameful treatment of the American envoys in France, "I will never send another Minister to France without assurance that he will be received, respected, and honored, as the representative of a great,

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free, independent, and powerful nation." Fifteen years later, still convinced that his attitude toward France in this instance was the correct one, he wrote to a friend that he wished no other inscription upon his tombstone than this: "Here lies John Adams who took upon himself the responsibility of peace with France in the year 1800." Those best competent to judge now agree that President Adams "acted boldly, honestly, and wisely, and for the welfare of the country in a very critical period."

Colonel "Dick" Thompson, Indiana's "Grand Old Man," writes as follows in his *Personal Recollections*: "Of Adams it may be most truthfully said that not one among the most illustrious statesmen of this country was more devoted to the cause of the American Colonies, or displayed more zeal or ability in their defense. In all the varied scenes through which he passed, his patriotism never faltered and was never called in question." Probably no family in the whole history of the public life of the United States has contributed more

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to the welfare of the country than the Adams family of Massachusetts. John Adams was peculiarly ardent and single-minded in his patriotic devotion. He was a jealous devotee. When George III of England, in the course of a conversation, implied that since Adams was not an admirer of France he must of necessity be partial to England, Adams bluntly replied: "I must avow to your Majesty that I have no attachment but to my own country." This attachment on the part of Adams was undoubtedly intense, but it was "maddening to his ego" to see other men exhibiting a like attachment in a manner different from his own. He must have been very hard to live with. He is described as "robust, rotund, learned, consequential, and fully conscious of his own merits, which were great." He believed in an aristocratic form of government—a government by "the rich, the well-born and the able," by men of education and of property. Unlike Jefferson, he had no faith in the wisdom of the masses of the people. He looked upon them as the easy dupes of design-

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ing demagogues. The "Democracy" advocated by Jefferson seemed to him a "most ignoble, unjust, and detestable form of government, its only excellence being that it soon passes away."

It is both interesting and pleasant to note, however, that in the evening of his life the rancor and asperity of the more active days had been greatly softened. He and Jefferson, both in retirement, were again on the best of terms. At the age of ninety-one, when the mists began to gather and Adams knew that his end was near, he remarked in quiet resignation to those about him: "Thomas Jefferson still lives." He did not know that Jefferson had passed away a few hours before. Strangely enough, Adams and Jefferson both died on July 4, 1826—the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. "The two aged men," says Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "floated, like two ships becalmed at nightfall, that drift together into port and cast anchor side by side."

## JEFFERSON

### JEFFERSON

In Thomas Jefferson a far abler man than his predecessor came to the presidential office. Jefferson must be accounted, I think, one of the six greatest men in the history of the public life of the United States prior to the Civil War. He was a well developed, well rounded, and symmetrical character. He showed a marked ability, not in one special line, but in several different and widely separated directions. No other American, with the exception of the many-sided Franklin, gave evidence of such versatility. He was a successful diplomat, a fairly strong executive, a leader in educational affairs, a close student of science, literature, and religion, an originator and promoter of improved scientific methods in agriculture, and the most adroit and successful political leader that the United States has yet produced. In addition to this he was a good mathematician, a ready and forceful writer, and a violinist of no mean order. "And with this rare assemblage of qualities and talents



## FROM WASHINGTON TO JACKSON

were blended a passionate love of home and family and a genius for friendship, which made him one of the most lovable characters among modern statesmen." And with all of these talents and accomplishments Jefferson was one of the most modest of men. "Was there ever," says Francis W. Hirst, "a democratic leader from Cleon to Lloyd George who blew so few blasts on his own trumpet as Jefferson?"

He was also a man of chivalrous and gentlemanly instincts. His devoted grandson, Thomas Jefferson Randolph, relates an incident which is significant in this connection. He and his grandfather were out riding one day when they met a Negro. The Negro bowed to them. Jefferson returned the salutation, but the young lad did not. Whereupon the "Sage of Monticello" turned to young Randolph and asked: "Do you permit a Negro to be more of a gentleman than yourself?"

Thomas Jefferson was descended from a substantial Welsh family which had settled in Virginia before the *Mayflower* brought the

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Pilgrim Fathers to New England. He was the third child in a family of ten. His father was Peter Jefferson, a man of superb physique and vigorous mentality. The Jeffersons were well-to-do and lived on a farm of nineteen hundred acres tilled by thirty slaves. The young Thomas was graduated in due time from William and Mary College; he then studied law and devoted himself successfully to farming and to the practice of his profession until called into public life. At the age of twenty-nine, he married Martha, the daughter of John Wayles, a lawyer who enjoyed an extensive and lucrative practice at the Williamsburg bar. A year later Wayles died and left his daughter four thousand acres of land and one hundred and thirty-five slaves. The finances of the Jefferson family were now in a very prosperous condition, as the landed estate, even before this inheritance was obtained, yielded an income of about \$2,000 per year. In addition to this, Jefferson's fees from his law practice amounted to about \$3,000---thus making a very com-

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fortable income for a family in Virginia in those days.

Although never a very thrifty business manager, Jefferson soon became one of the leading men of the State. His family, however, was not admitted to the exclusive social set of the "Old Dominion" until after he had arisen to fame. Although we hear a great deal at a later time of the brilliant social life at Mount Vernon, Monticello, and Montpelier, it is nevertheless true that neither the Washington, Jefferson, nor Madison family was a member of the select social coterie of Virginia families until after their chief representatives had arisen to high office.

In temperament Jefferson was a striking contrast to John Adams. He was more human and normal. He was also more conciliatory and but little inclined to nurse his hatred for other men. He did have at one time a very profound dislike for "Monocrats," New England clergymen, and Federal judges, but was not inclined, as Adams was, to make unseemly exhibitions of his antipathy. Mark Twain

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once remarked, "If a man is a pessimist before he is forty-eight he knows too much. If he is an optimist after he is forty-eight he knows too little." Jefferson ran counter to this rule and presented "the unusual spectacle of one who grew more optimistic with increasing years."

Francis W. Hirst, the noted English economist and publicist, remarks in his recent and admirable biography of Jefferson: "To the student of political philosophy Jefferson is the most interesting of all American statesmen, because he combined with a marvellous insight into the springs of human nature, and into the motives that sway individuals or masses, an extensive knowledge of political science and history."

In personal appearance Jefferson was rather impressive but by no means a handsome man. He was six feet two and one half inches tall and muscular as well. When he entered college at seventeen he was described as "tall, raw-boned, freckled, and sandy-haired, with large feet and hands, thick wrists, and prom-

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inent cheek bones and chin." His comrades described him as "a fresh, healthy-looking youth, very erect, agile, and strong, with something of rusticity in his air and demeanor." In early manhood, and more particularly in later life, he improved very markedly in personal appearance, although, unlike Washington, he was never very fastidious about his clothing. He often shocked European ministers, and apparently took great delight in doing so, by appearing in his tattered dressing gown and with his slippers down at the heel.

Although the accounts which have come down to us regarding the so-called "Jeffersonian simplicity" have, no doubt, been somewhat exaggerated, it is true that Jefferson cared little for ceremony, in either public or private life, and this fact commended him strongly to the masses of the people. John Fiske has told us that "the American people took Jefferson into their hearts as they have never taken any other statesman until Lincoln in these latter days." While Andrew Jackson might well be classed with Jefferson

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and Lincoln as a popular idol, it is undoubtedly true that Jefferson had a hold upon the affections of the people never excelled by any other public man in the United States. When he was elected President the bells rang and the cannons boomed and pandemonium reigned supreme. There was jubilation in every part of the United States except in some sections of New England; and even there his praises were not entirely unsung, as the newspapers of the time tell us that the denizens of the Hartford frog ponds croaked in unison for "the man of the people, the man of the people." Jefferson was, in truth, "the prophet of Democracy."

Jefferson's sway was a gentle one. He wielded no big stick. He was a leader, not a driver, of men. When President, if he wished an Act passed by Congress, he would perhaps express himself to that effect in casual conversation with some member of that body. There might be no request, no argument, and no agreement; but in all probability the legislator would hurry off to Congress and quietly

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make known the wishes of the chief executive, and forthwith the thing was done. He has been accused, it is true, of indirection and inconsistency; and yet he obtained results by his indirect methods, and unvarying consistency is "the bane of small minds."

The principles and the character of Jefferson have been the subject of violent and, in some cases, of needless controversy. It seems to me to be regrettable that so many of the biographers of Hamilton and Jefferson should think it necessary to pull down the one in order to exalt the other. It should be accounted a very fortunate circumstance that two such men as Hamilton and Jefferson lived in the formative period of the Republic. They represented, it is true, opposite poles of political thought, always opposing and never pulling in the same direction. While members of Washington's cabinet, they faced each other, as Jefferson said, "like two fighting cocks in a pit." Each, however, was a valuable corrective upon the other; and each supplemented the labors of his adversary. Hamilton

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was Anglican, and Jefferson Latin in his sympathies. Hamilton was an aristocrat and exalted the so-called "upper classes"; Jefferson was a democrat and had an abiding faith in the masses. Hamilton was a liberal constructionist and a centralizer of power, while Jefferson was a decentralizer and a strict constructionist. Hamilton was a nationalist and Jefferson an ardent advocate of "states' rights." In the course of events neither had his way to the exclusion of the other, but the line of development of the government has been, in a general way, the resultant between these two powerful forces.

The mention of Jefferson's name naturally suggests the Declaration of Independence. Since the nature and importance of this document have been the subjects of vigorous controversy in recent years, it might be interesting to note the estimate which Francis W. Hirst, a competent English critic, puts upon it. "If praise of the Declaration is superfluous," says Mr. Hirst, "criticism is vain. Modern taste may object to a word here or a



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sentiment there; but the whole will survive, an imperishable expression of a great moment in the history of freedom, in the history of nationality, in the history of republican government. Inspired by the crisis, in an atmosphere throbbing with popular emotion, Jefferson's studied prose reveals in its grandeur of purpose and depth of thought a noble response to the national call. Successful at the moment, fortunate in the event, it is and will remain, the most cherished possession of republican America." In another connection he speaks of the Declaration as "a document which stands in the history of human liberty with the Magna Charta." If the British Home Secretary were as demagogic as the mayor of one of our great American cities, he would cause the writings of Mr. Hirst to be collected in the court-yard of the London Tower and there consigned to the flames by the public hangman.

Jefferson's public service was unselfish and free from any mercenary tinge. When he entered public life as a young man he made a

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resolution "never to engage, while in public office, in any kind of enterprise, or to wear any other character than that of a farmer." He kept the faith. In fact he neglected his prudential affairs to such an extent that when he retired from the Presidency on the 4th of March, 1809, after an almost continuous public service of forty-four years, he feared that his creditors might not permit him to leave the Capital without arrest. And a few months after his death his beloved Monticello was sold to pay his debts. Unlike Washington, he was not thrifty in business affairs. He was also generous and accommodating to a fault. Even late in life, after he had weathered many financial storms, he indorsed a \$20,000 note for a friend and was compelled to pay it; yet with all his embarrassments the "Sage of Monticello" wielded, from his rustic retreat, a mildly despotic sway over the Republican party in particular and the whole people in general. There he lies buried, and the shaft over his grave bears an inscription written by Jefferson himself: "Here was buried Thomas

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Jefferson, author of the Declaration of American Independence, of the Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom, and Father of the University of Virginia."

Although Jefferson retired from public life in 1809, he and his principles dominated the government for sixteen years longer. Madison and Monroe, whom the newspapers of the time facetiously called James the First and James the Second, were his loyal personal and political friends and when in need of advice, they invariably consulted the "Oracle of Monticello."

### MADISON

James Madison, another member of a substantial Virginia family and an intimate personal and political friend of Thomas Jefferson, succeeded the latter in the presidential office in 1809. In personal appearance Madison must have presented a striking contrast to his predecessor. Jefferson was tall and strong, while Madison was a dried-up, wizened little man not more than five feet and six inches in height. Washington Irving in a spirit of jest

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called him "a withered little applejohn." When Madison and Jefferson walked down Pennsylvania avenue together they must have looked as if they were on their way to attend a "father and son" banquet.

Frail in body but powerful in mind, he had served his State and Nation well before becoming Secretary of State in the Jefferson administration. He was graduated at twenty-one from Princeton University—then the College of New Jersey—in 1772 and had returned to his Alma Mater for an additional year of work in Hebrew. He was at this time of a distinctly religious and philosophical turn of mind and it is probable that he seriously considered the ministry as his life work. If so, he was soon diverted and applied himself industriously to the study of law. He never wholly lost his interest in religious matters, however, and always set his face firmly against that bigotry and intolerance in religion which were all too prevalent in Virginia in his time.

After having had at least one unsuccessful

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love affair, this prim little man who always appeared prematurely old, was married at the age of forty-three to Mrs. Dolly Payne Todd, a beautiful and vivacious widow of twenty-six. The name of "Dolly Madison" is well known in the social annals of the White House. She was apparently a woman of ability, grace, and rare charm. As a mistress of the White House she has no rival unless it be Mrs. Grover Cleveland of a later time. She exercised a tactful social leadership in Washington and her "extraordinary beauty" and "rare accomplishments" are frequently referred to by the writers of the time. About the time of his marriage, Madison established his beautiful country home, "Montpelier," and there and in Washington the home life of the Madisons was an ideal one for more than forty years. One does not like to recall the fact that, after the death of her gifted husband, Dolly Madison, the brilliant "dowager queen," spent the evening of her life in poverty and obscurity.

Madison, like Jefferson, was destined to

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give his best efforts to the public service rather than to the practice of law. This service was sound and substantial rather than brilliant or picturesque. It was an eminently constructive service. As a matter of fact, we may look upon Washington, Madison, Hamilton, Jefferson, Franklin and John Marshall as the six vital men in the formative period of the Republic. They were the founders of the American Union. In this group, Madison was "the modest scholar and the profound thinker." "Unlike his friend Jefferson, who could hardly speak in public, Madison was one of the most formidable parliamentary debaters that ever lived. Without a particle of eloquence or of what is called personal magnetism, with a dry style and a mild, unimpassioned delivery, he would nevertheless have been a fair match for Charles Fox or the younger Pitt. His vast knowledge was always at command, his ideas were always clear and his grasp of the situation perfect, and although he was so modest that the color came and went upon his cheeks as upon a young girl's, he was never flurried

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or thrown off his guard. He represented pure intelligence, which is doubtless one reason why his popular fame has not been equal to his merit. There is nothing especially picturesque about pure intelligence, but it is a great power nevertheless.”<sup>1</sup>

Madison will be remembered as a scholar rather than as an executive. No man of his time prepared himself so thoroughly and so conscientiously for a public career. While a student at Princeton, although frail in body, he gave himself unreservedly to his task, and one of his biographers tells us that he succeeded in carrying the studies of the junior and senior classes in a single year. In his knowledge of history, political science, and constitutional law, he was without a peer among the men of his day; and no one of them, with the single exception of Hamilton, deserves to be mentioned with him in this respect. As a thinker he was both profound and constructive, and is seen at his best in the Constitutional Convention. He was the most

<sup>1</sup> John Fiske, *Essays*, Volume I, pp. 204-5.

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useful man in that illustrious body, and has been deservedly called the "Father of the Constitution."

In addition to taking a leading part in the constructive work of the Constitutional Convention, Madison became the historiographer of that body. He felt that the Convention was a notable body of men and was destined to do a work of unusual importance. He had also encountered great difficulty in ascertaining the fundamental facts about federal government, ancient and modern. He accordingly made up his mind to take copious notes on the proceedings and debates of the Convention and thus preserve for posterity a faithful record of the acts and sentiments of that great body.

He preëmpted a front seat in the convention hall and according to his own testimony was present every day and almost every hour while the Convention was in session. He took rapid notes, making use of a system of shorthand of his own invention, and often sat up far into the night making a clean copy of



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his manuscript. These papers, usually called *Madison's Journal*, are the most important and the only complete source of information in regard to the making of the Constitution of the United States. Inasmuch as certain parts of the contents of this *Journal* were not particularly flattering to individual members of the Convention, Madison decided that it should not be published while any of the members of that body were living. Strangely enough, Madison, himself, though not the youngest, was the last of that memorable body of men to pass away. He died at Montpelier in 1836 at the age of eighty-five and the *Journal* was published soon after by the government of the United States.

In political information and in ethical ideals his standards were equally high. On one occasion, when a candidate for the Virginia legislature, he came to the conclusion, as he said, that more chaste methods of electioneering should be resorted to. He therefore refused to make a personal canvass or to purchase drinkables to assuage the election thirst. This start-

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ling and intolerable innovation was promptly rebuked by his decisive defeat.

In debate Madison was quiet and conciliatory but yet effective. He never addressed any audience, large or small, friendly or unfriendly, without fear and trembling. He was described as "modest, quiet, and reserved in manner, small in stature, neat and refined, courteous and amiable." In temperament he was quite unlike Gouverneur Morris, who said that he never experienced the slightest nervousness or concern when facing any audience whatever. He also differed from his old companion in arms, James Wilson of Pennsylvania, who apparently took a rare delight in smashing down the defenses of his adversary in debate with his sledge-hammer blows. He also differed from Hamilton, whose arguments were of the overmastering, dominating, and compelling kind. And yet in some instances he was more effective than any of his three great colleagues. There is an old adage which says: "Mediocrity which forbears will accomplish more than a genius which irritates." Madison was far

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above mediocrity and knew how and when to forbear.

As an executive, however, Madison does not shine so brilliantly. The hand that wields the pen with effect is not always the best fitted to grasp the helm. The temperament of the cloister recoils at the sight of the rough-and-tumble methods of party strife. Madison was too sensitive and deferential, not positive and decisive enough, to make an efficient executive. As a result, he was pushed aside by men more determined than himself. The one great event of his administration was the War of 1812, and Madison, as a man of peace, held out against this contest as long as he could. He was finally compelled to yield, much against his better judgment, by Clay, Calhoun, and the other "War Hawks" of the time. These men got behind the President, pushed him into the conflict, and then rather ungraciously called it "Mr. Madison's War." Great Britain richly deserved a declaration of war—and France, too, for that matter—but the wise and conservative opinion in the

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United States in 1812 was in favor of a pacific policy with further attempts at arbitration. If James Madison had had the disposition of a Grover Cleveland the War of 1812 would probably never have taken place.

Madison's Presidency was by no means a failure, but it was not on a par with his earlier achievements. Like Grant's, it was an anti-climax to his career. Both men rendered their best and most effective public service before becoming Presidents of the United States. Madison's greatest strength lay not in his executive ability but along more constructive lines. As a "fair weather sailor" he probably would have done well enough, but he was not equal to the task of guiding the "Ship of State" in the troubled waters of a war period. "Madison was a master of ideas, but not of men." He was a great man, but not a great President.

## MONROE

James Monroe, a member of another substantial Virginia family, succeeded to the Presidency in 1817. He was a native of West-

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moreland county and was descended from a Scotch Cavalier family which came to Virginia about 1650. His particular locality was rich in famous men and came to be known as "The Athens of Virginia." It was the home of Washington and Madison as well as of Richard Henry Lee and of his famous cousin, "Light-Horse Harry" Lee, the father of Robert E. Lee, Confederate commander in the Civil War. The old home of the Marshall family was also in the same locality.

As a stripling, James Monroe entered William and Mary College, said to have been at that time the richest institution of learning in North America. It had an annual income of \$20,000. He could not have remained in college very long, however, as at the outbreak of the Revolution "two tall and gallant youths" cast their books aside and fought valiantly for the independence of the colonies. One of these youths was James Monroe and the other, his classmate, John Marshall. Monroe was eighteen years of age when he entered the service, and Marshall about twenty.

## MONROE

Monroe was always an intimate personal friend of Thomas Jefferson and this fact was a great assistance to him in his political advancement. He was a lawyer but did not seem to have any great interest in his profession. Public life attracted him. In fact he gave so much time to the public service that he had little opportunity for the serious or consecutive practice of law.

Monroe was seven years younger than Madison and unlike him in almost every respect. He was six feet tall, broad, square-shouldered, and impressive in personal appearance. He was a man of rugged physique, raw-boned, and by no means handsome. He was, however, a man of great physical strength and superb endurance. At one time during the War of 1812, Monroe had charge for a short period of three cabinet departments—State, Treasury, and War—and for a period of ten days and nights he did not go to bed or remove his clothing but “was in the saddle the greater part of the time.”

Although there was a quiet dignity about

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his bearing, Monroe did not impress his contemporaries as a particularly cultured man. He was awkward and diffident and without grace in either manner or appearance. In his old age he was especially modest and sensitive and was scrupulously careful to conduct himself in a manner befitting the dignity of an ex-President of the United States. He thought it unseemly, for example, for a man who had held this high office to connect himself in any way with party politics. Although modest and sensitive, however, he was free from that vanity and envy which constituted the besetting sin of John Adams.

Like Jefferson, Monroe was never particularly effective as a public speaker. He was also a labored writer and his state papers are much inferior to those of Madison. Aside from the matter of expression, Monroe was not as logical or level-headed as his predecessor and these characteristics were, of course, reflected in his writings. He was fond of history and although he wrote with difficulty he aspired to authorship. He wrote a small book which

## MONROE

he called *A Comparison of the American Republic with the Republics of Greece and Rome*. When the manuscript was completed he submitted it to Judge Hay and asked for his estimate of it. The estimate came in the laconic sentence, "I think your time could have been better employed."

Monroe was nearly fifty-nine years of age when he became President and had been prominent in public life for many years prior to that time. He was not a member of the Constitutional Convention of 1787 but was chosen in the following year, at the age of thirty, to sit in the convention of his own State which ratified the Constitution after a memorable struggle. Monroe opposed the ratification very strenuously. He was a states' rights man and opposed on principle to centralization in government. He, with George Mason and Patrick Henry, contended in the Convention with Madison, John Marshall and Edmund Randolph.

He was also at a later time a United States Senator, an Envoy to France, and Governor



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of his native State, as well as a prominent member of President Madison's Cabinet. In 1803, he had assisted Robert R. Livingston in the purchase of Louisiana, and prior to that time had served as Minister to France. His mission was a failure and he wrote a book of five hundred pages in a futile effort to justify his conduct. It was clearly a case of protesting too much.

Monroe lived in retirement in Virginia and New York for six years after leaving the presidential office and died on the fourth of July, 1831. On April 28, 1858, the one hundredth anniversary of his birth, his ashes were carried under escort to Richmond, Virginia, and there reinterred in Hollywood Cemetery.

The estimate of Dr. Daniel C. Gilman, the first President of Johns Hopkins University and also one of the biographers of Monroe, is interesting in this connection. "On reviewing all that I have been able to read in print and in manuscript, and all I have been able to gather from the writings of others," he remarks, "the conclusion is forced on me that

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Monroe is not adequately appreciated by his countrymen. He has certainly been insufficiently known, because no collection has been made of his numerous memoirs, letters, dispatches, and messages. He has suffered also by comparison with four or five illustrious men, his seniors in years and his superiors in genius, who were chiefly instrumental in establishing this government on its firm basis. He was not the equal of Washington in prudence, of Marshall in wisdom, of Hamilton in constructive power, of Jefferson in genius for politics, of Madison in persistent ability to think out an idea and to persuade others of its importance. He was in early life enthusiastic to rashness, he was a devoted adherent of partisan views, he was sometimes despondent and sometimes irascible; but as he grew older his judgment was disciplined, his self-control became secure, his patriotism over-balanced the considerations of party. Political opponents rarely assailed the purity of his motives or the honesty of his conduct. He was a very good civil service reformer,

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firmly set against appointments to office for any unworthy reason. He was never exposed to the charge of nepotism, and in the choice of officers to be appointed he carefully avoided the recognition of family and friendly ties. His hands were never stained with pelf. He grew poor in the public service, because he neglected his private affairs and incurred large outlays in the discharge of official duties under circumstances which demanded liberal expenditure. He was extremely reticent as to his religious sentiments, at least in all that he wrote. Allusions to his belief are rarely if ever to be met with in his correspondence. He was a faithful husband, father, master, neighbor, friend. He was industrious, serious, temperate, domestic, affectionate. He carried with him to the end of his life the good-will and respect both of his seniors and juniors. Many of those who worked with him, besides those already quoted, have left on record their appreciation of his abilities and their esteem for his character.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *James Monroe*, pp 213-15.

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Monroe, then, although a man of somewhat less magnitude than his predecessor, was, nevertheless, a useful and successful President. While Minister to France he had been recalled by President Washington on account of an ostentatious and silly display of affection for that country; and he has always been given too much credit for his modest part in the so-called "Monroe Doctrine"; yet no man did so much as he to bring about that period commonly known as "The Era of Good Feeling." Monroe was a man of impressive appearance and soldierly bearing, and when he made his two extended trips, the one through the North and the other through the South, delivering cordial and sensible addresses wherever he went, he did a great deal toward breaking down that spirit of sectionalism and party strife which was then growing strong in the United States.

Not much remains to be said in conclusion. It should be noted, however, that Monroe was the last of the "Virginia Dynasty" which had occupied the President's chair continu-

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ously since the adoption of the Constitution with the exception of the four years of John Adams. Monroe was not as great a man as any of his predecessors in the presidential office and yet his administration was a peculiarly successful one—much more so than that of his immediate predecessor. He was an industrious and genial plodder, rather mildly endowed intellectually, and without much of a vision of the future. At times he lacked perspective and a sense of relative values. He was sometimes opinionated and often too much inclined to quibble over matters of small moment. He was, however, patient, sensible, and conciliatory, and always advised his friends, in a kindly way, “to leave their quarrels at the door.”

He did, moreover, give his best efforts, without stint, to the service of his country. He stopped a Hessian bullet in the battle of Trenton and carried it with him for the rest of his days. After the close of the Revolution he devoted his whole life to civic duty and retired from the Presidency practically without

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a dollar. It was at this time that he sold "Oak Hill," his Virginia home, and took up his abode in New York City.

His labors were rewarded in a currency of a different kind. His administration has come down to posterity enveloped in a genial and kindly atmosphere. John Adams, living in retirement but watching the trend of events with a seeing eye, pronounced the Monroe Presidency "without a fault." John Marshall declared that it "was not darkened by a single cloud." On the whole the administration of James Monroe must be looked upon, not as a series of brilliant achievements, but rather as "a triumph of the homely and common virtues."

## JOHN QUINCY ADAMS

Monroe's successor is one of the lofty peaks in the presidential range. John Quincy Adams was probably the greatest man in the presidential office from Washington to Lincoln with the single exception of Thomas Jefferson. He was not the most influential man of the

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period—Andrew Jackson was that; neither was he the most capable and successful President; but, all things considered, John Quincy Adams must be accounted, I think, the greatest man to occupy the President's chair for half a century.

John Quincy Adams was a son of the "blunt and irascible old John Adams," the second President of the United States. It would be difficult to find a family in American history which has rendered a more effective or a more disinterested service to the country than the Adams family of Massachusetts—and the greatest of this family was John Quincy. He was born in the year following the repeal of the Stamp Act—in the midst of the Revolutionary agitation; and at the age of seven, in company with his mother, he climbed a high hill near his home to listen to the guns at Bunker Hill and to gaze in awe upon the flames of Charlestown. At nine he upbraided himself in a letter because he had just entered the third volume of Smollett, when, according to his schedule, he should have been half

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Soon after retiring from the Presidency, he was elected a member of the House of Representatives from Massachusetts. He held this position until the time of his death, seventeen years later, and became known as "The Old Man Eloquent," and as an able and fearless champion of the "right of petition." He was stricken at his post of duty while attending a session of the House on February 21, 1848. A bronze star embedded in the floor of the Capitol building marks the exact spot. There, as his biographer in the *American Statesman Series* has remarked, "the stern old fighter lay dying almost on the very field of so many battles and in the very tracks in which he had so often stood erect and unconquerable, taking and dealing so many mighty blows." Two days later he passed away, one of the most cruelly maligned men in American history.

During these seventeen years in the House of Representatives Adams exhibited a remarkable fidelity to duty. He was usually present at his post, he was tireless in commit-



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tee work, and always voted in an intelligent and well-informed manner. It was his marvellous power of public speaking, however, that was his distinguishing trait in those years. "Living in the age of oratory," says John T. Morse, "he earned the name of 'the old man eloquent.' Yet he was not an orator in the sense in which Webster, Clay, and Calhoun were orators. He was not a rhetorician; he had neither grace of manner nor a fine presence, neither an imposing delivery, nor even pleasing tones. On the contrary, he was exceptionally lacking in all these qualities. He was short, rotund, and bald; about the time when he entered Congress, complaints became frequent in his *Diary* of weak and inflamed eyes, and soon these organs became so rheumy that the water would trickle down his cheeks; a shaking of the hand grew upon him to such an extent that in time he had to use artificial assistance to steady it for writing; his voice was high, shrill, liable to break, piercing enough to make itself heard, but not agreeable. This hardly seems the picture of

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an orator; nor was it to any charm of elocution that he owed his influence, but rather to the fact that men soon learned that what he said was always well worth hearing. . . . When invective fell around him in showers, he screamed back his retaliation with untiring rapidity and marvellous dexterity of aim. No odds could appal him. With his back set firm against a solid moral principle, it was his joy to strike out at a multitude of foes. They lost their heads as well as their tempers, but in the extremest moments of excitement and anger Mr. Adams's brain seemed to work with machine-like coolness and accuracy. With flushed face, streaming eyes, animated gesticulation, and cracking voice, he always retained perfect mastery of all his intellectual faculties. He thus became a terrible antagonist, whom all feared, yet fearing could not refrain from attacking, so bitterly and incessantly did he choose to exert his wonderful power of exasperation. Few men could throw an opponent into wild blind fury with such speed and certainty as he could; and he does

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not conceal the malicious gratification which such feats brought to him. A leader of such fighting capacity, so courageous, with such a magazine of experience and information, and with a character so irreproachable, could have won brilliant victories in public life at the head of even a small band of devoted followers. But Mr. Adams never had and apparently never wanted followers. Other prominent public men were brought not only into collision but into comparison with their contemporaries. But Mr. Adams's individuality was so strong that he can be compared with no one. It was not an individuality of genius nor to any remarkable extent of mental qualities; but rather an individuality of character. To this fact is probably to be attributed his peculiar solitariness." <sup>1</sup>

John Fiske also refers to Adams's skill and power in debate and to the vituperative character of his vocabulary. "As a parliamentary debater," says Fiske, "he has had few if any superiors; in knowledge and dexterity there

<sup>1</sup> *John Quincy Adams*, pp. 228-232.

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was no one in the House who could be compared with him; he was always master of himself, even at the white heat of anger to which he often rose; he was terrible in invective, matchless at repartee, and insensible to fear. A single-handed fight against all slave-holders in the House was something upon which he was always ready to enter, and he usually came off with the last word. Though the vituperative vocabulary of the English language seemed inadequate to express the hatred and loathing with which the pro-slavery party regarded him, though he was more than once threatened with assassination, nevertheless his dauntless bearing and boundless resources compelled the respect of his bitterest opponents, and members from the South, with true chivalry, sometimes confessed it."

Adams certainly had an "ever-ready and merciless tongue." He referred to John Randolph of Roanoke on one occasion as a "frequenter of gin lane and beer alley," and on another occasion he referred to the falsehoods which "the skunks of party slander . . . have

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been . . . squirting around the House of Representatives, thence to issue and perfume the atmosphere of the Union." Adams was honest, blunt, and tactless and could stick pins into people in a very matter-of-fact and unimpassioned way. He was always ready to hew to the line and let the chips fall where they would. It did not accord, for example, with his idea of the fitness of things when Harvard College proposed to confer the degree of Doctor of Laws upon Andrew Jackson. He expressed himself pointedly at the time and took pleasure in referring to the "hero of New Orleans" as "Doctor Andrew Jackson." "As myself an affectionate child of our Alma Mater," he said, "I would not be present to witness her disgrace in conferring the highest literary honors upon a barbarian who could not write a sentence of grammar and hardly could spell his own name."

Adams was regular in church attendance and read three chapters of the Bible every day but he was never "plenteous in mercy" and many of his phrases were strikingly un-

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biblical. The soft answer, for example, had no place in his rhetorical arsenal. In spite of his barbed tongue, however, he won, through his honesty and ability, the respect of his contemporaries. A striking evidence of this fact was seen on one occasion in the House of Representatives. He had been stricken by paralysis in the streets of Boston in November, 1846. Three months later, he returned to Washington. When he entered the House, the members, many of whom had felt the sting of his whip-lash rhetoric, stood up in their places as a mark of respect while the doughty old warrior was being escorted to his seat by a committee appointed for that purpose.

Adams was peculiar and individual. He was nominally a Republican—there was no other party at the time; and yet in spirit he was independent and non-partisan. He maintained a high standard of public and private morality. He scorned the building up of a political machine. He refused to make removals from office at the behest of political

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managers. He felt a keen and personal responsibility for the administration of his high office. As a matter of fact, his high standards were an element of weakness in his administration. They were too high to permit of a mutual understanding with the men with whom he dealt. These men did not always understand the language which he spoke. As a result of this fact his administration was not as successful as his great talents would seem to warrant. Many of his words and deeds, however, bore good fruit in the later decades of our history.

Adams was also a melancholy and pathetic figure. He apparently looked the part. He is said to have been "the most shabbily dressed man who has sat in the Presidential chair." His contemporaries vow that he wore the same hat for ten years. It was apparently not worn out by being "thrown into the ring." He lived a life of more than Jeffersonian simplicity. He was a solitary man. He worked and played and thought alone. It was his habit, when in the White House, to rise

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before day-break, build his own fire, read a chapter or two in the Bible, and then take a walk on the deserted streets or a swim in the Potomac River while other government officials slept peacefully on. And yet in his isolation he evolved plans for the welfare of the country which were broad, statesman-like, and nationalistic in character "but far beyond the grasp of the masses . . . in this dawning day of the new democracy."

Personally, Adams was not a particularly attractive or magnetic man. In this respect he resembled somewhat the late Benjamin Harrison, who, in the political slang of the day, was frequently termed "a pretty cold proposition." He was intellectual rather than emotional, and his temperament was far removed from that of the popular idol. Being "a Puritan of the sternest and most uncompromising sort, who seemed to take a grim enjoyment in the performance of duty, especially when disagreeable," he had a splendid "talent for making enemies." No man ever cared less for popular favor, if that favor had to be



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gained by truckling to the whims of the multitude. When Edward Everett asked him on one occasion if he intended to do nothing at all to bring about his election to the Presidency of the United States, his simple reply was: "Absolutely nothing." At close range such simple honesty as this often appears to be stupidity, or at best a species of stubbornness coupled with a haughty reserve. You cannot make a reigning popular favorite out of an honest and outspoken statesman. He must bide his time. So it was with Adams. In these latter days, however, John Quincy Adams is coming into his own. He is coming to be recognized as one of the greatest of American statesmen. In ability and acquirements, in honesty of purpose, broad humanity and high ideals, John Quincy Adams was not excelled by any public man of his day; and I say this fully conscious of the fact that the day of Adams was also the day of Andrew Jackson, of Henry Clay, of John C. Calhoun, and of Daniel Webster.

**FROM JACKSON TO LINCOLN**



## CHAPTER II

### FROM JACKSON TO LINCOLN

**B**ETWEEN Jackson and Lincoln the presidential curve reaches its lowest point. This period of twenty-four years constitutes a long, barren, and monotonous stretch in the course of which the Presidency came perilously near to the "slough of despond." During this period, says Viscount Bryce, "from Jackson to the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, the Presidents were either mere politicians, such as Van Buren, Polk, or Buchanan, or else successful soldiers, such as Harrison or Taylor, whom their party found useful as figure-heads. They were intellectual pigmies beside the real leaders of that generation—Clay, Calhoun, and Webster." "Jackson himself," he adds, "was something of both politician and soldier, a strong character, but a narrow and uncultivated intellect."

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This judgment, while true in the main, is, like most generalizations, too sweeping and indiscriminating to be wholly just.

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Andrew Jackson, for instance, was vastly more than a soldier-politician. He was the most influential man in American politics from the time of Jefferson to the opening of the Civil War. He dominated public affairs during his own and Van Buren's administration, and after his retirement to the "Hermitage," King Andrew, as the papers of the time facetiously called him, continued his benevolent reign. He was, as Viscount Bryce says, particularly in the early part of his career, a narrow and uncultivated intellect. But this is only one side of the shield. He was a man of impulse, but his impulses were, for the most part, sound. He was also a strong leader of tremendous motive power and bold initiative, absolutely honest and with the courage of his convictions. Andrew Jackson presented a figure little less than heroic

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when, on Jefferson's birthday in 1830, he arose in his place at the banqueting table and, in an atmosphere surcharged with the spirit of nullification, pronounced his famous toast: "The Federal Union: It must be Preserved." Unconsciously he was paving the way for the great work of Lincoln a generation later. If he had done nothing else his existence would have been abundantly justified.

Jackson was a good representative of that rugged and rigid Scotch-Irish element which came to the uplands of the Carolinas about the middle of the eighteenth century. His father, also named Andrew, came to this locality from the northern coast of Ireland in 1765, bringing with him his wife and two sons. The young Andrew, who afterwards became President of the United States, was born in 1767, a few days after his father's death. Even at the present time there is no agreement as to the exact location of his birth-place. It was near the boundary line separating the two Carolinas and some contend that it was in South Carolina and others in North.

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Jackson, himself, however, in at least three official documents, speaks of himself as a native of South Carolina.

The schools of his locality were poor and scarce. Even if they had been better and more numerous it is not at all likely that the young Andrew would have profited much by them. He had none of the traits or tendencies of the scholar. He was not book-minded. He was a youth of unbounded and restless activity. He had a fiery and ungovernable—certainly an ungoverned—temper and soon drifted into military service where his impetuosity was his characteristic trait. From the army to politics was an easy and obvious transition in those days, and Jackson soon became a popular idol in civil as well as in military life. At various intervals in his career he also gave some attention to saddlery, to farming, and to law. At fourteen, he was left alone in the world to fight his way up. At seventeen, he abandoned the saddlery trade and took up the study of law. He never became much of a lawyer, however; in the first place he

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never applied himself seriously to the study of his profession, and in the second place he was not legally or judicially minded. His talents lay in another direction. He was, however, a successful farmer and plantation master, and was kind and considerate to those under his control. His financial credit was good, and a note bearing his name was always accepted.

In politics Jackson was impulsive rather than judicial. Jefferson said to Webster in 1824 that he had often, while presiding over the Senate, seen Jackson get up in his place to speak and "then choke with rage so that he could not utter a word." Any proposition which did not commend itself to him as honest and straight-forward in every respect was thoroughly repellent. His instincts were fundamentally honest, but his judgment was often at fault. He never vacillated, however, and the sobriquet of "Old Hickory," which he earned in the War of 1812, was characteristic of his rigidity in civil as well as in military life.



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This kind of temperament does not commend itself as an ideal one for a man in a high executive position, and, as a matter of fact, it was far from being so. Jackson himself realized as much at one time. When his friends first broached the matter of the Presidency, he scouted the idea. "Do they suppose," said he with some warmth, "that I am such a d—d fool as to think myself fit for President of the United States? No, sir. I know what I am fit for. I can command a body of men in a rough way but I am not fit to be President." Clay was of the same opinion. In speaking of Jackson he remarked significantly that a military hero was not a fit person to be President of the United States. This is perhaps the only point upon which Jackson and Clay ever agreed, and the agreement, even in this case, was quite unintentional.

Another element of weakness in the make-up of Jackson was his inclination to believe everything of a derogatory character that anyone might say of Adams. The worst was

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none too bad. Politicians said that Adams had made a corrupt bargain with Clay in 1824 involving the Presidency and the secretaryship of State; they said that Adams was a monarchist and an aristocrat; that he had written a poem reflecting on the character of Jefferson; that his wife was an English woman; that he had made a subscription to a turn-pike road and had refused to pay it; that he was wealthy; that he was in debt; that he was a chronic office-seeker; that he had purchased a billiard table for the White House with public money—these and a score of similar charges found lodgment in Jackson's receptive mind. But notwithstanding these regrettable defects of character, Jackson rendered a splendid service to the American Republic.

Jackson stands as the personification of a new era in the history of the United States. The colonial days had passed and the national period was in reality just beginning. The older statesmen of the constitutional period had now, for the most part, passed off the

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scene. Washington, Hamilton, John Adams, and Jefferson were dead, and Madison and Monroe were in retirement. A new set of statesmen had arisen to take their places and the "Spoils System" in politics was being introduced. A new era in industry was also just dawning. This was the time of the beginning of the railroad, of ocean navigation, of the screw-propeller, of the McCormick harvester, of the use of anthracite coal and friction matches,—the day of the modern daily paper, of the founding of great cities, of immigration, and of the Abolitionists and other reformers. It was a day of crudeness, coarseness, and even of vulgarity; but at the same time a day of the most intense energy. In letters also the new republic was finding itself. Irving, Cooper, and Bryant were laying the foundations of American literature. Last, and in some respects most important of all, the democracy of the West was about to triumph over the aristocracy of the East. Up to this time every President had been the product of the culture and refinement of the

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Atlantic seaboard, and the new West, rising like a giant in the Mississippi and Ohio valleys, had never been recognized. Then as now, there were many wise men in the East who were not tall enough to look over the Alleghany Mountains and recognize the possibilities of the great western country. In the election of Jackson the common people felt that they had come into their own. Jackson, more than any other man, represented the ideals and ambitions of his time. He was as crude and as intense as his age. He himself was a western pioneer. He entered a law office at eighteen and, while attempting to scrape up a speaking acquaintance with Blackstone and other legal worthies, with only meager success it must be admitted, he was described as "the most roaring, rollicking, game-cocking, horse-racing, card-playing, mischievous fellow" that the locality had ever known,—which was really saying a great deal, as wild oats were a staple crop in Kentucky and Tennessee in those days. He fought in the Revolution at fourteen and won

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his spurs against the British at New Orleans in 1815. He was quick and handy with horse-whip and pistol, had killed his man in a duel, and in one instance had pitched his adversary downstairs in a tavern brawl and carried a bullet for twenty years as a reminder of the episode. "Yes, I had a fight with Jackson," said Senator Thomas H. Benton in a reminiscent mood; "a fellow was hardly in the fashion then who hadn't."

The constitutional convention of Tennessee of 1796 had certain rules of order which impress one as being significant. One of them was this: "He that digresseth from the subject to fall on the person of any member shall be suppressed by the speaker." Inasmuch as Jackson was a member of that convention the rule might not have been entirely superfluous. In spite of his impulsiveness and crudeness, however, he was a strong and forceful personality, compelling either loyal friendship or bitter enmity on the part of those with whom he came in contact. When he was inaugurated the so-called plain people

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came from all parts of the United States to witness the triumph of their great apostle. They were not a silk-stockinged set. A writer of the time has put it on record that they overturned bowls of punch and smashed glasses and climbed with muddy cow-hide boots upon finely upholstered furniture in an effort to obtain a glimpse of their hero. Webster wrote as follows: "To-day we have had the inauguration. A monstrous crowd of people is in the city. I never saw anything like it before. People have come five hundred miles to see General Jackson and they really seem to think that the country is rescued from some frightful danger." "The people came to believe that he could do no wrong, and that he stood like the angel with a flaming sword, guarding their interests against the designs of the politicians."<sup>1</sup> The fears which the people expressed were, for the most part, unfounded; and yet the coming of Jackson with all his faults and crudities was beneficial to the country. Lincoln used to say

<sup>1</sup> H. W. Elson, *History of the United States*, p. 498.

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that the government needs an occasional bath of the people. Jackson administered such a bath in 1829.

It is not easy to set forth in brief compass an adequate estimate of Jackson's character and public services. There are two distinct sides to the shield. He was undoubtedly at times violent, vindictive, and even lawless. He was also prejudiced and ignorant in regard to many subjects with which he had to deal. He was narrow-minded and intolerant. His attitude toward the Bank of the United States was a mistaken one and his "pet bank" scheme was a dangerous economic heresy. He was never able to see the other side of a question. He knew next to nothing of economics, finance, or banking, and yet he made far-reaching decisions involving all of these subjects with the naïve confidence of a Delphic Oracle.

In politics he had a "one-track mind." He liked to play a "lone hand." He never doubted his own infallibility. When he became President he appointed a Cabinet of

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good ability but he rarely consulted it. His so-called "Kitchen Cabinet," made up of certain political and personal friends who came to the White House with an easy intimacy, was far more influential. We now have, said Webster, in this country, two Cabinets, the Cabinet proper and the Cabinet improper.

But with all of this he was a man of supreme courage and militant honesty. He never lowered his colors in any contest. He was a "fiery horseman" who always carried his fight into the very heart of the enemies' camp. He never admitted defeat. His imperious will-power always sustained him. One of his schoolmates remarked, "I could throw him three times out of four, but he would never *stay thrown*." Another companion paid him a still higher compliment when he said that Jackson was the only bully whom he had ever known who was not a coward at the same time. He was less wise and less cultured than some but none possessed a greater spirit or displayed a truer Americanism. "He was rapid in decision, courageous in counsel, and



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vigorous in action." He was always dominant and frequently domineering. The head of the table was always where McGregor sat down.

Jackson was the first President elected from the great and growing West. He brought its breezy atmosphere with him to Washington. "He came to the White House fresh from the hands of the people." He could still hear his worshippers shouting, "Down with the aristocrats," "Turn the rascals out," and "Long live Andrew Jackson, the hero of New Orleans and the boy fighter of Hanging Rock." Their hot breath was still lingering upon his cheeks. The militant Western democracy would not be denied. It is small wonder, then, that he was sure of himself in every emergency.

Jackson was not judicially minded. He had a temper. "He not only swore, but he frequently quarrelled and fought; he was at one time given to betting, particularly on horses; he drank, and he used tobacco constantly. All of these habits were common in the society to which he was born, and he did not

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escape them. But some things he did escape. He hated debt all his life, and was willing to do almost anything rather than incur it. He had the greatest reverence for women, and bore himself towards them with a courtesy and tenderness, a knightly purity of thought and word and deed, which the finest gentleman of the most ancient society in the world could not have surpassed.”<sup>1</sup>

The opinion of Webster, his great contemporary, is interesting in this connection. “General Jackson,” said Daniel Webster in 1837, “is an honest and upright man. He does what he thinks is right, and does it with all his might. He has a violent temper, which leads him often to hasty conclusions. It also causes him to view as personal to himself the public acts of other men. For this reason there is great difference between Jackson angry and Jackson in good humor. When he is calm, his judgment is good; when angry, it is usually bad. . . . His patriotism is no more to be questioned than that of Washington.

<sup>1</sup> William Garrott Brown, *Andrew Jackson*, pp. 7-8.

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He is the greatest General we have and, except Washington, the greatest we ever had."

The story of Jackson's home life is an epic in peace, harmony, and good will. "His devotion to his wife while she lived, and to her memory after she was gone, was rarely beautiful."<sup>1</sup> She has been described by a contemporary as "a short, fat dumpling," red-faced and beaming, but to Jackson she was the most beautiful woman in the world. Her photograph was always upon his table and before retiring at night he would sit in front of it and read from her prayer book. He also kept his promise to her that he would join the church. He did this in the evening of his life because, as he said, men would accuse him of hypocrisy if done at an earlier time. A knowledge of these facts is one of the reasons why pilgrims turned kindly faces toward the "Hermitage" and why "people's thoughts went back to the grim, gaunt figure, long since at peace in the grave."

<sup>1</sup> H. W. Elson.

## VAN BUREN

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Martin Van Buren was the first man of Dutch ancestry to occupy the presidential chair. He differed from his predecessors not only in race but in temperament and point of view as well. He was described by his contemporaries as small in stature with a round red face and searching eyes. He was affable and engaging in manner, pleasing in conversation, and withal a very attractive personality. These qualities, added to a good mental equipment, carried him far in the political world. After holding some comparatively minor offices he was elected to the United States Senate. This position he resigned to become Governor of New York. After serving in this capacity for two months he resigned his governorship to become Secretary of State in President Jackson's Cabinet. Thus within three months he held three of the greatest offices in the United States and was, moreover, next in line for the Presidency.

The sweeping statement of Viscount Bryce

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does scant justice to Martin Van Buren. Van Buren was undoubtedly not one of the great Presidents; neither should he be classed, however, with the "mediocrities" or "accidents" of the White House. He was, as one of his biographers has remarked, "a first-class second-class man." He came to the Presidency severely handicapped. Jackson and his opponents had sown the wind, and Van Buren was compelled to reap the whirlwind; and, to continue the breezy metaphor, the "political hurricane" of the campaign of 1840 swept him from the presidential chair. In a word, Van Buren was held responsible for the panic of 1837 and kindred evils. "The country made up its mind that he was a small, selfish, incapable politician, and it judged him accordingly." It did him an injustice. Many of the catch phrases of the day carried cruel and unjust criticisms. The partisan press and hostile campaign speakers heralded him as "little Van," "the American Talleyrand," "the little Magician," and "the Machiavelli of American politics." The sinister slogan, "Vote

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early and often," coined by his son John Van Buren, also served to prejudice the public mind against him.

Van Buren is another man who fought his way up from the ranks of the poor and humble to the highest official position in the United States. His father was a Dutch farmer and tavern keeper living in a very modest way at Kinderhook, New York. His early education was meager in quantity and very inferior in quality, but he had a good mind and a serious purpose and availed himself of every means of self-education. As a result he became an eminent lawyer, a convincing debater, and a writer of correct and effective English. He began the study of law at fourteen, and later became the law partner and intimate personal friend of Benjamin F. Butler in Albany.

As a political leader and organizer he had no superior among the men of his time; in fact, he had reduced political organization to a fine art. He lacked the tremendous driving power of Jackson but he infinitely excelled

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his gruff chief in tact and in the ability to deal with men.

His domestic life was happy and above reproach. His one great sorrow was the death of his wife when he was thirty-seven years of age. Loyal to her memory, he never re-married. When nearly four score he died near the place of his birth on his country estate which he had named "Lindenwald." It was here that Irving some years before had put the finishing touches on his *Knickerbocker's History of New York*.

Even when the shadows began to lengthen, Van Buren's political and personal enemies were relentless in their persecution and he suffered merciless flagellations at the hands of those who hated the whole Jacksonian *régime*. Much of this was undeserved but even now many historical writers are still inclined to look upon Van Buren as a scheming, wire-pulling politician. As a matter of fact, he was a very capable man and would have given the country a good administration under more favorable conditions. He was an eminent law-

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yer, a skillful politician, a refined, polite, and cultured gentleman, and a man of regular, correct, and temperate habits. Mr. Edward M. Shepard's estimate is probably too high. In his life of Van Buren he says: "If to the highest rank of American Presidents be assigned Washington, and if after him in it come Jefferson and perhaps Lincoln . . . the second rank would seem to include Madison, the younger Adams, and Van Buren." I am confident that most critics would strike out the word "perhaps" in connection with Lincoln and that not all would place Van Buren on a level with Madison and John Quincy Adams; yet he was undoubtedly above the average of American Presidents both in ability and in character.

Colonel "Dick" Thompson, a contemporary of Van Buren, remarks in his *Recollections*: "The administration of Van Buren was in every sense a failure . . . Jackson was bold and courageous, while Van Buren was timid and cowardly. Jackson shrunk from no responsibility pertaining to his position, Van



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Buren always did.”<sup>1</sup> This positive *dictum*, I feel sure, will not stand the test of close historical scrutiny. In the first place, it should always be borne in mind that Van Buren was the political legatee of Jackson. Jackson’s mantle fell upon his shoulders and in one of his early presidential utterances he pledged himself “to follow in the footsteps of his illustrious predecessor.” He did this so faithfully that some historians have called his administration “a third term of Andrew Jackson.”

Van Buren found no little difficulty in living up to the specifications of this promise. He found it as difficult to follow Jackson in office, as Madison did to follow Jefferson, and Taft to follow Roosevelt, and yet he did surprisingly well considering his handicaps.

He was, as we have already noted, an adroit politician. He was smooth-tongued as well as smooth-shaven and much given to gum-shoeing and political legerdemain. Many stories are told, some of them doubtless

<sup>1</sup> Volume I, p. 187.

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legendary, about the non-committal character of his utterances. He was without doubt "a machine-made politician," but it must be remembered to his credit that he, like Chester A. Arthur at a later date, rose splendidly on many occasions to meet the requirements of his great office.

His inheritance from the Jacksonian *régime* was both difficult and embarrassing. As soon as he moved into the White House he found the panic of 1837 crying lustily on his doorstep. This panic, it should be noted, was due to a variety of causes with which Van Buren had had little or nothing to do and which he was powerless to remedy. Jackson's ill-advised banking policies had thrown the finances of the country into a state of confusion; speculation and the over-expansion of business had gone to absurd extremes, thus causing an artificial prosperity which was certain to prove ephemeral. When the bubble broke the government was asked to wave its magic wand and bring the parts together again. President Van Buren's answer to the request

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was wise, sincere, and courageous. He said that the government could not undertake to manage the private business affairs of individuals and thus attempt to bring about a return of national prosperity. The people, he contended, would have to accomplish that for themselves by means of hard work and a strict adherence to economic laws. He consequently sought refuge for the Nation's finances in the establishment of the Independent Treasury System and left the commercial problems of the panic to be solved by due process of economic law. Many present-day politicians would do well to take a leaf out of Van Buren's note-book rather than mislead their constituents with promises which they should know are incapable of fulfillment.

The reasons for the apparent failure of Van Buren's administration stand out in much bolder relief at the present time than they did in 1840. The people, in their short-sighted way, held the President responsible for all the economic ills accruing from their own foolishness and defeated him overwhelmingly when

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he was a candidate for a second term. In this campaign, which has been denominated "a huge frolic" and "a joyous romp," the people sang:

Van! Van!  
Is a used up man

and they voted as they sang.

## WILLIAM HENRY HARRISON

Between Van Buren and Lincoln seven men occupied the presidential chair. Two of these—Harrison and Taylor—owed their preferment to military fame rather than to statesman-like qualities. Two others were Vice-Presidents who succeeded to the Presidency, and the remaining three were "dark horses," or men of inconspicuous ability. All seven of these Presidents were men of mediocre talents and modest attainments and it was during this period that the Presidency reached its low-water mark, if we except the partial term of Andrew Johnson. Mr. James Morgan's explanation of the prevalence of second- and third-rate men at this time is interesting.

## FROM JACKSON TO LINCOLN

"It was," he says, "an ignoble period in our politics when both parties were dodging the irrepressible issue of slavery, and the smaller the candidate for President the better chance he had to dodge the question." <sup>1</sup>

It has been truly said of General Harrison that "he was not a great man, but he lived in a great time, and had been a leader in great things." Harrison was a member of an illustrious Virginia family and was born two years before the battles of Lexington and Concord. His father was Benjamin Harrison who had long been a leader in his native State. He had joined hands with Patrick Henry and James Monroe in 1788 in opposing the ratification of the Federal Constitution, but gave it his enthusiastic support immediately upon its adoption.

The young William Henry was a student at Hampden-Sidney College and entered upon the study of medicine. His professional education was apparently cut short, as we find him, at the age of eighteen, fighting Indians on the

<sup>1</sup> *Our Presidents*, p. 85.

## WILLIAM HENRY HARRISON

frontier. From that time on, for many years, his career was intimately connected with Indian affairs. At times he appeared as their master upon the battlefield, and again as the defender and protector of their rights and interests. He protected them from the ravages of small pox and whisky and in many other ways strove to better their condition. His most famous victory over the red man was won in the Battle of Tippecanoe fought seven miles north of the present site of Lafayette, Indiana.

After serving with distinction in the War of 1812, in the United States Senate, and as foreign minister, he retired to the seclusion of his country home at North Bend, near Cincinnati, Ohio. Here he served his neighbors in a modest way as "clerk of the county court and president of the county agricultural society." It was from this rustic retreat that he was called to the Presidency of the United States. His previous career would not seem to have constituted a very good preparation for the Presidency, and he might not have been

## FROM JACKSON TO LINCOLN

elected to that position if some one had not discovered that the east end of his house at North Bend was constructed of logs. Instantly the name of this man, with the flavor of the back-woods about it, became connected with log cabins, coon skins, and hard cider and the people began to sing the praises of "Tippecanoe and Tyler too." All this appealed powerfully to the imagination of the period and "old Tip" received two hundred and thirty-four electoral votes to sixty for Martin Van Buren. He died of pneumonia—some say that he was worried to death by office seekers—on April 4, 1841, just one month after his inauguration. His term of service was so short that he really made no record in the presidential office. He was, however, a man of sound patriotism and rugged honesty, if not of statesman-like qualities. His impulses were sound and courageous. When his end was near, his mind began to wander and he exclaimed, as if addressing his successor in office: "Sir, I wish you to understand the principles of this government.

## WILLIAM HENRY HARRISON

I desire them carried out. I ask nothing more.” John Tyler, the Vice-President, then served as chief magistrate of the Nation for a period of three years and eleven months.

It is not a difficult task to analyze the character of William Henry Harrison or to place an estimate upon his public services. His character was a simple and transparent one and his public services were performed out in the open in the plain sight of all men. There was nothing subtle, sinister, or questionable about any phase of his character or achievement.

He was a member of a leading Virginia family but not a member of the “Virginia Dynasty,” so long entrenched in the presidential office. He was a son of the “Old Dominion” but an adopted son of the western border. The new West had been the scene of his military and political activity and he found his way to the White House over the same road which Andrew Jackson had travelled in 1828. He differed from Jackson in most essential respects, and yet both men personified the



## FROM JACKSON TO LINCOLN

great and growing West. They did it in dissimilar ways, however. Jackson had all the dash and abandon of a young Lochinvar while Harrison maintained a sobriety of demeanor not often encountered on the frontier. Both men were militantly honest. Harrison, as governor of a boundless area, had abundant opportunity for his own enrichment, "but he left the office with hands as clean and pockets as empty as when he entered it."<sup>1</sup>

Harrison is the only man ever elected to the Presidency by his enemies. His candidacy was undoubtedly somewhat illogical and his opponents made so much of this fact and magnified his shortcomings to such an extent that a reaction set in in his favor. John Quincy Adams called him "a political adventurer" and a Baltimore newspaper advised him not to aspire to the Presidency but to be content to remain in his log cabin and drink his hard cider in the midst of his familiar environment of coon skins. The advice had a boomerang effect and Harrison was wafted into office at

<sup>1</sup>James Morgan.

## WILLIAM HENRY HARRISON

the close of a breezy campaign which Andrew D. White has called "an apotheosis of tomfoolery."

Harrison set a record in this campaign which promises to remain unbroken for many years. He went, in one long stride, from the position of Clerk of Hamilton County, Ohio, to the White House in Washington. He was also the first Whig to attain the Presidency.

President Harrison was sixty-eight years of age at the time of his inauguration and not in the best of health. Moreover, he exposed himself, quite unnecessarily, to the inclement March weather, without overcoat or gloves, and undoubtedly suffered as a result. In fact, this imprudence may have shortened his days.

His inaugural address was delivered in due time after having been revised and polished by Webster, his Secretary of State, and was printed in the Philadelphia papers on the day of its delivery. This was also a new speed record. The steam locomotive as the carrier of the address had displaced "old Dobbin"

## FROM JACKSON TO LINCOLN

for the first time in the history of Inauguration Day.

The new President appointed an exceptionally able Cabinet and began his duties with the best of intentions; but exposure and the onslaughts of hungry office-seekers who had tasted the sweets of victory for the first time were more than his frail constitution could endure, and he passed away just thirty days after his inauguration. His place in history must, therefore, rest upon his achievements prior to his coming to the Presidency. His Cabinet in announcing his passing remarked: "His death was calm and resigned, as his life had been patriotic, useful and distinguished." So passed away the old weather-beaten son of the frontier and the hero of the Tippecanoe and the Thames!

### TYLER

John Tyler, the new President, was a Democrat elected on a Whig ticket. He had been nominated with General Harrison in order to attract those Democrats who were

## TYLER

out of harmony with the Van Buren administration. When Tyler became President, the Whig members of Congress soon found that he had a mind and a will of his own. Immediately after the Whig victory, General Harrison felt that Mr. Clay was presuming too much and said to him coldly, "You seem to forget, sir, that it is I who am President." Tyler's general attitude might have been similarly expressed. His whole administration was a running fight with Congress, in the course of which he vetoed important measures relating to the bank, the tariff, and internal improvements. On one occasion (September 9, 1842), he vetoed the Fiscal Corporation Bill after having apparently promised the leaders in Congress that he would approve the measure when it reached his desk. This seemed to the Congressional leaders "a deliberate act of bad faith." When Tyler was a small boy in Virginia he attended a school taught by one John McMurdo, who was careful not to spoil the child by sparing the rod. Tyler remarked at a later time that "it was a wonder he did

## FROM JACKSON TO LINCOLN

not whip all the sense out of his scholars." Clay and some of the other public men of the time would probably agree that he did so quite effectively in at least one conspicuous instance.

Tyler has been accused of apostasy by the Whigs. This is not entirely fair. Tyler's Whiggery consisted in his hatred of Andrew Jackson. He was put on the ticket to make it "face both ways" and catch votes going and coming. The Whigs didn't want Tyler for his own sake. They wanted Tippecanoe but they soon found that they had Tyler, too. Tyler did "ditch the Whigs," but this might have been expected. He had almost nothing in common with them and he had made no promises to them unless his acceptance of a place on the ticket was an implied obligation. The Whigs apparently had no conception of the element of stubbornness in Tyler's character. "The people, simple folk," says Schooler, "imagined that Tyler would follow Harrison's plans with the same sad reverence with which he had followed his hearse." They were soon disillusioned.

## TYLER

Tyler was born in Virginia in the second year of Washington's first administration and was graduated from William and Mary College at the age of seventeen. While in college he became interested in history, poetry, and music and became, like Jefferson, a skillful violinist. Two years after his graduation, he was admitted to the bar and was soon after called into public life. He served in the State legislature, the national House of Representatives and in the United States Senate. He also served as Governor of Virginia and Chancellor of William and Mary College. He was a man of no mean oratorical ability and was always a factor to be reckoned with while in Congress. He opposed the Bank and condemned the "gag rule" against which John Quincy Adams spoke so effectively. Referring to the Bank as "the original sin against the Constitution," he exclaimed, "Shall I permit this serpent, however bright its scales or erect its mien, to exist by and through my vote?" He had his own ideas on all public issues. They were not necessarily reasonable

## FROM JACKSON TO LINCOLN

or right but they were honest and his own. He also had the courage of his convictions. On one occasion, in the Senate of the United States, he cast a solitary negative vote and on another, while President, he spurned a compromise, denouncing it as "a contemptible subterfuge, behind which he would not skulk." Clay persistently underrated him. "Tyler dares not resist," said he. "I'll drive him before me;" to which Tyler, with his bristles all set, retorted, "I pray you to believe that my back is to the wall, and that, while I shall deplore the assaults, I shall, if practicable, beat back the assailants;" and it must be admitted that he did put up a stiff fight on many occasions.

One should not be deceived by appearances, however. In spite of these facts, President Tyler was not a constructive statesman with penetrating insight or breadth of vision. Mere stubbornness sometimes masks under the guise of strength. Tyler also lacked those indefinable personal qualities which are necessary to true leadership.

## TYLER

In some respects, Tyler's political preferment was greater than his talents would seem to justify. He had none of that self-abnegation which comes to the humble-minded. He was exceedingly proud of the social standing of his family and considered himself quite infallible in his political opinions. He was correspondingly intolerant of the views of others; and yet he did have a certain suavity of manner which was very attractive. "He was a man of talents and a gentleman, but not a great man." "Even the work of filial piety undertaken by his son fails to show the President as more than an average gentleman of fine breeding, with something of the pertinacity and cunning of the politician in him, but little of the strength and vision of the statesman." <sup>1</sup>

Tyler went out of office "unwept and unsung." After retiring from the Presidency in March, 1845, he took up his abode on an estate beautifully situated on the bank of the James river and to which he gave the redolent

<sup>1</sup> David S. Muzzey.



## FROM JACKSON TO LINCOLN

name of "Sherwood Forest." There he lived a quiet but influential life until the time of his death seventeen years later. He took a lively interest in all national affairs and was a leader in the secession movement, although by no means radical in his views. His ashes now repose in Hollywood Cemetery, Richmond, a few yards from the grave of James Monroe.

It is interesting to note at this point that Tyler was the first Vice-President to succeed to the Presidency. On the whole it must be confessed that the arrangement for the election and succession of the Vice-President, prescribed in the twelfth amendment to the Constitution, has not been entirely successful. It was thought by the framers of the document that the Vice-President would be one of the leading men of the Nation and also the "heir apparent" to the throne. This was true in the cases of John Adams and Jefferson but the custom soon lapsed. For twenty-four years after Jefferson's term of office, it was the custom in the Republican party to nominate

## POLK

the Secretary of State for the Presidency, but since Jackson's time there has been no fixed rule in this regard. The twelfth amendment, adopted in 1801, does not appear to have given satisfactory results. Gouverneur Morris opposed it at the time on the ground that a man expressly elected to that "ambiguous position" would not usually be of the first rank. He preferred the older method whereby an Elector voted for two men without specifying which one he preferred for President. The fears of Morris were well founded. The vice-presidency is too often used to conciliate a "minority faction" or to comply with certain geographical considerations. The natural fitness of the candidate for the possible duties of the office are not considered.

## POLK

James K. Polk was certainly the least conspicuous man who had ever been put forth by any political party for the Presidency of the United States. He was a most uninspiring candidate whose views were politically

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“discreet” and not too well known. He was, therefore, in the language of politics, an “available” candidate. He was a “dark horse” and his nomination was the result of a stampede on the part of those who for one reason or another were opposed to the other and more prominent candidates. “Polk, Great God, what a nomination!” was the remark of Governor Letcher of Kentucky when he heard that the Democratic National Convention of 1844 had passed by Tyler, Van Buren, and Calhoun and had nominated James K. Polk of Tennessee. The convention was held in Baltimore and the news of the nomination was telegraphed to Washington. This was the first practical use of Morse’s great invention.

Polk was born in North Carolina in 1795 and was the oldest of a family of ten children. His ancestors came from Ireland and the name was originally Pollock, not Polk. His father was a farmer and surveyor and appears to have lived in prosperous and comfortable circumstances. The young Polk was well educated, having been graduated from the Uni-

## POLK

versity of North Carolina at the age of twenty-three. He made a good record in college—a remarkable one in some respects.

The year after his graduation he took up the study of law, was admitted to the bar in due time, and was building up a very successful practice when called into public life.

Although born in North Carolina, his active career was identified with the State of Tennessee, where the family had taken up its abode when the young James was eleven years of age. He was elected to Congress and was Speaker of the House of Representatives at the time that John Quincy Adams was leading the fight for the right of petition. He was later Governor of Tennessee and was twice defeated for the same position. In the course of his political campaigns he became an effective public speaker and was often referred to by admiring friends as "the Napoleon of the stump." Looking back upon Polk's career one almost suspects that there might have been a slight tinge of sarcasm lurking in this appellation.

## FROM JACKSON TO LINCOLN

Polk did have his good qualities, however. He was thoroughly honest and independent. His motives were pure and his ideals high. His will was of iron and his purpose definitely fixed. He was intensely religious and his private life was above reproach. He was, however, so enamored of the wisdom and righteousness of his own views that he had small capacity for harmonious action with other men. As a result of this weakness, his administration was characterized by an unusual amount of factional controversy.

Polk's nomination was more or less accidental—the result of a fortuitous combination of circumstances. His election, however, was not so. It was largely due to the fact that he made a candid and straightforward pronouncement upon the leading issue of the day—the annexation of Texas—with no attempt at evasion or “beating ’round the bush.” In April of 1844, he declared himself in favor of “the immediate re-annexation of Texas to the government and territory of the United States.” And he stood by his guns consistently

## POLK

throughout the campaign. His opponent, Henry Clay, on the other hand, a far abler man, by the way, declared against immediate annexation. He then proceeded to explain this declaration and later explained his explanation to such an extent that the people became confused and really did not know just where Clay stood. Polk reaped the reward of his candor and consistency.

In looking back over Polk's administration of four years—like Hayes, Polk announced when he accepted the nomination that he would not be a candidate for a second term—it is extremely difficult to account for these extravagant words from the pen of George Bancroft, the noted historian: "His (Polk's) administration, viewed from the standpoint of results, was perhaps the greatest in our national history, certainly one of the greatest." It is well to remember in this connection that these words were written forty years after the close of Polk's administration and by one who served in that administration as Secretary of the Navy. It may be that an

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honest friendship for the President warped the judgment of the historian. Polk was not a great or a brilliant man and the results of his administration are not outstanding. On the contrary, he was rather mediocre as a public man, narrow in his vision, and intensely partisan. The results of the administration accorded nicely with the talents of its chief.

### TAYLOR

One term of Polk was enough. In the meantime Texas had been annexed and the Mexican War had been fought and won. The war was not a popular one but it produced two popular heroes in Generals Zachary Taylor and Winfield Scott. Both men were considered for the presidential nomination. "Old Rough and Ready" Taylor appealed to the popular imagination and he was nominated by the Whigs over Henry Clay, the perennial candidate, whose star was on the wane. General Winfield Scott, familiarly known as "Old Fuss and Feathers," was *persona non*

## TAYLOR

*grata* to the masses because of his dignity and culture.

The Democrats nominated General Lewis Cass of Michigan, an abler man, a shrewder politician, and one more experienced in governmental affairs. He also had had a good record in the War of 1812. On the face of things Cass should have been preferred, but Taylor was a popular hero, a man of the plain people without much education or social polish, while Cass was a cold, wealthy, and dignified individual who held himself aloof from the madding crowd. In addition to this, Van Buren "knifed" Cass in New York and thus gave the electoral vote of that State to Taylor—and as New York went so went the Nation.

Harrison had had some experience in public civil life before his election to the Presidency, but Taylor had been in the army since early manhood and had had no training in governmental affairs. Taylor was a soldier and only that. He knew nothing of politics and had no conception of the duties and



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difficulties of the presidential office. He was as a child gazing in awe at the complicated mechanism of a Hoe press. His position was almost pathetic. Although nominated by the Whigs, he was in no sense a party man. In fact, he had never voted. He had no definite views upon the great questions of the day and was not a little embarrassed when compelled to get some on short notice. Lowell made the most of the ludicrous situation in his *Biglow Papers*. He represented General Taylor as evading inquiries in regard to his views concerning slavery, the Mexican War, the Wilmot Proviso, and other live questions, but as pronouncing with great definiteness and emphasis upon the Bank and other dead issues. The candidate is made to conclude as follows:

Ez to my princerples, I glory  
In hevin' nothin' o' the sort,  
I ain't a Wig, I ain't a Tory,  
I'm just a candidate, in short.

A well known English literary critic recently remarked: "You are as likely to be born with

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a silk hat on your head as with a good (literary) taste implanted in your breast." It is equally true that no man is likely to be born with all of the qualifications of a great executive. A man can scarcely hope to be a successful President of the United States without a reasonable amount of theoretical knowledge and practical experience in governmental affairs.

Zachary Taylor, like Andrew Jackson and William Henry Harrison, owed his election to military glory rather than to prominence in civil life. In fact, Taylor was elected to the Presidency of the United States upon the same basis that the giant guard or the dodging half-back is sometimes elected to the presidency of his class in college.

Taylor was a member of an old but not a particularly illustrious Virginia family. His early days were spent on a farm in the back country where opportunities for education and general culture were very meager. There was, however, abundant opportunity for military service and in due course of time this hardy

## FROM JACKSON TO LINCOLN

lad of the frontier developed into an effective Indian fighter and later into the "Old Rough and Ready" of the Mexican War.

When nominated for the Presidency by the Whig party in 1848 over Clay, Webster, and other leaders, his views were "unknown and undeveloped." He had no political ambitions or aspirations but wished only, when he retired from the army, to spend the remainder of his days on "a stock farm in the hills." No platform was adopted by the nominating convention. None seemed necessary. As one of his supporters remarked: "General Taylor was able and honest and could be trusted to do the right thing." He did do the right thing according to his best lights. He was a man of rugged honesty, high character, and strong personality, and these qualities, combined with his courage and common sense, might have given the country an acceptable administration of public affairs, had his life been spared. He died in the White House on July 9, 1850, after a service of only sixteen months. He was buried near Louisville, Ken-

## FILLMORE

tucky, where a fine granite shaft, thirty-seven feet high, marks his resting place. He was succeeded by the Vice-President, Millard Fillmore, who thus became the second "accidental President" of the United States.

## FILLMORE

Fillmore was a native of New York and, like Garfield and Lincoln, fought his way up from grinding poverty to the chief magistracy of the Republic. His early surroundings and opportunities were not promising. He attended the back-woods school for three months each winter and thus had, as one of his biographers has remarked, abundant opportunity for "forgetting during the summer what he acquired in the winter." His home life was also uninspiring in most respects. His father's library is said to have consisted of two books—"the Bible and a collection of hymns." "He never saw a copy of *Shakespeare*, or *Robinson Crusoe*, a history of the United States, or even a map of his own country, until he was nine-

## FROM JACKSON TO LINCOLN

teen years of age!" As an apprentice to a trade at fourteen, he had a sad and unpleasant experience which caused him to abandon this project for the study of law. His entry upon his chosen profession was considered auspicious. He won his first case and with it a fee of four dollars. He was later elected to Congress where, as chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, he had a valuable legislative experience. In this respect, he had a great advantage over his immediate predecessor in office, and he differed from him in many other respects as well. He was notably less independent. Clay and other Whig leaders found him more pliant and more inclined "to listen to reason," as they put it. He did not approach Clay, or Webster, or Seward in ability, but as a President he was "safe," honest, and worthy. He has been denominated "a Northern man with Southern sentiments," and when he signed the Fugitive Slave Law he signed his own political death warrant. He was, however, the candidate of the "Know-nothings" for the Presidency in 1856.

## PIERCE

### PIERCE

Second-rate men were now becoming fashionable in the Presidency of the United States. Franklin Pierce was elected to that office in preference to many other men of superior ability. Pierce, a Democrat and strict constructionist, was a native of New Hampshire where his father was a farmer. He entered Bowdoin College in 1820 and was graduated four years later, standing third in his class. Among his college mates were the poet Longfellow, and his intimate personal friend and biographer, Nathaniel Hawthorne. After his graduation he studied law and became a successful practitioner. He sat in both houses of Congress but finally resigned his seat in the Senate to resume the practice of his profession. The Mexican War, however, called him into the public service again and he distinguished himself by conspicuous personal bravery. In the convention of 1852, Pierce was, like his predecessor, a "dark horse." His name did not appear until the

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forty-ninth ballot. He was nominated on the fifty-second over James Buchanan, Stephen A. Douglas, William L. Marcy and Lewis Cass—all abler men than he, but not so “available” from the political standpoint. Pierce’s “exquisite urbanity” aided him in the campaign as well as in the convention. He was handsome, amiable, colorless, and “safe”—and hence “available.”

The Whigs in turn nominated General Winfield Scott, the “Hero of Lundy’s Lane and Chapultepec.” They had succeeded admirably with a military hero in two previous campaigns and were disposed to try it a third time. They missed their guess. Scott was overwhelmingly defeated. He carried only four states.

One of Pierce’s biographers, Mr. Bainbridge Wadleigh, sums up his characteristics as follows: “As an advocate he was never surpassed, if ever equalled, at the New Hampshire bar. He had the external advantages of an orator, a handsome, expressive face, an elegant figure, graceful and impressive gesticu-

## PIERCE

lation, and a clear, musical voice, which kindled the blood of his hearers like the notes of a trumpet, or melted them to tears by his pathos. His manner had a courtesy that sprang from the kindness of his heart and contributed much to his political and professional success. His perceptions were keen, and his mind seized at once the vital points of a case, while his ready command of language enabled him to present them to an audience so clearly that they could not be misunderstood. He had an intuitive knowledge of human nature, and the numerous illustrations that he drew from the daily lives of his strong-minded auditors made his speeches doubly effective. He was not a diligent student, nor a reader of many books, yet the keenness of his intellect and his natural capacity for reasoning often enabled him, with but little preparation, to argue successfully intricate questions of law."

This estimate is neither impartial nor discriminating. Pierce had some success at the bar but he was not a great lawyer nor a great man. He did have a wonderful opportunity,



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but did not have the character to dominate the slavery situation. He had a mandate from the people such as no other President had received since James Monroe, but he was not big enough or strong enough to utilize it. He might have been a national President. He chose to be a sectional one. He stood for the "finality" of the compromises of 1850 and at the same time appointed Jefferson Davis his Secretary of War—a man utterly opposed to the compromises. He promised the country a rest from the vexations of slavery agitation and yet he threw all his personal and official influence in favor of the Kansas-Nebraska Bill which repealed the Missouri Compromise and threw the fat into the fire. He then took the side of slavery in "Bleeding Kansas" and his New England neighbors looked at him askance. He was inoculated with the views of "Manifest Destiny" and connived, in a sinister way, at the annexation of Cuba. His fine presence and his oily suavity could not atone for his lack of vision and of firmness. His executive ability was slight and things did

## BUCHANAN

not go well. His popularity waned and at the end of his term his sectional friends, whom he had served not wisely but too well, discarded him in favor of James Buchanan, his Minister to Great Britain.

## BUCHANAN

Buchanan, a Pennsylvania man, was well known in public life for many years before he became President of the United States. After being graduated from Dickinson College in 1809, he studied law, but soon the allurements of public life drew him away from his profession. A Jacksonian in politics, he sat in the House of Representatives and in the Senate and also served as foreign minister and Cabinet member. In all these positions, he rendered an honest and acceptable service to the country. While not as decisive and as outspoken as many of his predecessors, he did, at times, express his views in no uncertain way. In 1852, he opposed the candidacy of General Scott for the presidential nomination. "Beware," he said, "of elevating to the high-

## FROM JACKSON TO LINCOLN

est civil trust the commander of your victorious armies." He was, however, careful to differentiate between the professional soldier and the soldier who came to the defense of his country in the time of crisis.

The closing years of Buchanan's life were spent in a quiet but influential retirement at his country home, "Wheatland," about a mile from Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

While personally attractive and fairly successful as a diplomat, Buchanan did not prove a capable executive in the time of national stress. Dr. Von Holst's view is, however, undoubtedly extreme. He speaks of the timidity, the moral cowardice, the dilatoriness, the indecision, and the lack of statesman-like qualities of the President, and refers to him in connection with the events of 1859 as "a weak-kneed old man." George Ticknor Curtis, the noted constitutional historian, errs, but not so grievously, on the other side, when he says, "No man was ever treated with greater injustice than he was during the last seven years of his life by a large part of the public. Men

## BUCHANAN

said he was a secessionist; he was a traitor; he had given away the authority of the government; he had been weak and vacillating; he had shut his eyes when men about him, the very ministers of his Cabinet, were plotting the destruction of the union; he was old and timid; he might have crushed an incipient rebellion, and he encouraged it. But he bore all this with patience and dignity, forbearing to say anything against the new administration, and confident that posterity would acknowledge that he had done his duty. . . . Mr. Buchanan's loyalty to the Constitution of the United States was unbounded. He was not a man of brilliant genius, nor did he ever do any one thing to make his name illustrious and immortal, as Webster did when he defended the Constitution against the heresy of nullification. But in the course of a long, useful, and consistent life, filled with the exercise of talents of a fine order and uniform ability, he had made the Constitution of his country the object of his deepest affection, the constant guide of all his public acts."

## FROM JACKSON TO LINCOLN

The doctors have always disagreed in their diagnosis of the case of President Buchanan and doubtless will continue to do so. We cannot hope to settle the mooted question of the extent of his culpability as a "weak outgoing President," but we can set forth a few facts which may be of assistance in formulating an opinion, or at any rate, in comprehending the complexities of the situation.

James Buchanan was the son of an Irish immigrant who settled in Pennsylvania, built a log cabin, and conducted a country store. After an early romance which resulted in a sad disappointment to the two persons most intimately concerned, he remained a bachelor, more or less lonely and solitary, all the rest of his days. He had no helpmate to cheer and to advise, but his niece, Miss Harriet Lane, presided in an exquisite manner and with an unfailing tact and charm, over the White House during his Presidency.

He was graduated from college in due time after a somewhat stormy career, in the course of which he tried conclusions with the faculty

## BUCHANAN

and invariably found himself in possession of the hot end of the poker. He then studied law and had become a successful practitioner when he turned his attention to the public service. He spent his whole active life in politics. He held office of one kind or another for forty years. He had more political experience before attaining the Presidency than any other occupant of the chair. But, as James Morgan has remarked, "Office holding does not, cannot make a leader. It is more likely to unfit a man for leadership."<sup>1</sup> In the course of these forty years of officialdom, Buchanan, never a positive character, had compromised with his conscience so often that, by the time he became President, the rigidity of character, so essential to success in a troubled time, was conspicuously lacking. The fiber of his character had deteriorated under the constant blunting. Without much executive ability and lacking the courage of his convictions, his administration was marked by indecision and timidity. He faltered and

<sup>1</sup> *Our Presidents*, p. 127.

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vacillated when the situation demanded courage of the highest sort. There was no treachery or disloyalty in his make-up, as has been so freely charged. He meant well, but he "meant well feebly;" and some of his political advisers and even members of his own Cabinet, instead of assisting him to surmount his difficulties, as loyalty should have dictated, were engaged in "tying his hands" behind the scenes.

The times were tense. The Dred Scott decision was announced within two days of his inauguration and the fireworks of the slavery agitation began to explode about his ears. In these circumstances, which almost demanded the heroic, he sent a namby-pamby message to Congress in which he declared that the States must abide by the Constitution and the laws—but if they did not do so he had no power to compel obedience. William H. Seward's pointed comment on this message, in a letter to his wife, was that "it is the duty of the President to execute the laws—unless somebody opposes him; and that no State has a

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right to go out of the Union—unless it wants to.”

Buchanan was still hoping that somehow the calamity of civil war “might yet be averted.” He still had in his mind the “business man’s peace” involved in the compromises of 1850. The times demanded radical action but his advisers reminded him that radical action was “bad for business.” He then made a “truce” with the South Carolina men and during this long period of inaction and uncertainty preparations for war went on apace in the South, much to the embarrassment and subsequent hurt of the Federal cause. He was warned also, more than once, of the trend of events. Blunt and square-toed Edwin M. Stanton said to him: “You are sleeping on a volcano. The ground is mined all around and under you and ready to explode, and without prompt and energetic action, you will be the last President of the United States.”

This is, in brief, the case against Buchanan. Let us now see what may be said on the other



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side. In the first place, it must be conceded, that his position was a most difficult and trying one. No outgoing President has ever been called upon to face such trials as those which confronted Buchanan. It may be difficult to excuse, but it is not difficult to explain his lack of "energetic action."

In the first place, the responsibility was *his*, not his advisers'; and it is no trivial matter to plunge a great nation into the throes of civil war. A prudent man will think twice before doing so. Again, the President was naturally reluctant to commit the Nation to a policy which might be reversed or abandoned in the course of a few weeks. He was marking time and hoping against hope. It is now plain that compromise was a vain hope. The time for compromise had passed. What Lowell called "the panacea of palaver" had failed, but Buchanan was not wise enough or brave enough to recognize that fact and to say, as Lincoln said, "The tug has to come, and better now than later." The coming of Lincoln to a storm-tossed nation now seems

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little less than an act of divine Providence.

Some critics, it seems to me, demand rather more than the circumstances warrant. James Ford Rhodes says, "When we compare what he did with what he ought to have done, we may affirm with reason that of all of our Presidents, with perhaps a single exception, Buchanan made the most miserable failure." Again Mr. Rhodes thinks that the President should have pronounced "a ringing declaration" instead of uttering the weasel words of his message. The demand, it seems to me, is exorbitant and unreasonable. Buchanan, simply because he was Buchanan, was incapable of uttering a "ringing declaration." It would be as reasonable to ask the three black crows that sat on a tree to sing with the voices of nightingales. It is also easy enough to say, fifty years after the event, what should have been done in any specific case.

The people themselves cannot escape their due share of the responsibility. They were as

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hesitant and faltering as he. And Congress had no more courage than the President. The whole country was irresolute and it is hardly good sportsmanship to pack the sins of the multitude upon the back of a scape-goat and then send him away into the wilderness.

Colonel Thompson, a kindly critic of the opposition party, tells us that "at the time of their occurrence many of the acts of Buchanan's administration seemed to" him "not only hurtful to the country, but unpardonable"; but, he continues, it may have been that the President "was striving with perfect sincerity" for the perpetual preservation of the Union. "That he was held responsible for many things not justly chargeable against him is probably true, in view of the intense excitement which prevailed." Yet "a feebleness of purpose and a timidity of conduct" "contributed in a large degree to results that might have been escaped by bold and intrepid action on his part." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Recollections*, II, 357-8.

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Again, we might ask, were the people, in view of all the circumstances, justified in expecting "bold and intrepid action"? Is a public man wholly responsible for his modest mental equipment or his lack of moral fiber? He should not, perhaps, have aspired to an office whose requirements exceeded his abilities, but the electorate has some responsibilities. Buchanan was what he was in 1856 and the people were well aware of it; yet they made him President because he was "available," and they nominated him because they thought he could carry the important State of Pennsylvania—which he did by a majority of 1025 in a vote of nearly half a million.

There was, moreover, little assurance that his opponent would have done any better than he, had he been elected. John C. Frémont was little more than an adventurer. He had had no political experience of any consequence and was quite innocent of any unusual intellectual endowment; yet he was the old "Pathfinder" enveloped in a glamour of romance. He carried about him the invigor-

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ating atmosphere of mountain and plain and he smelled of the mold of the forest. As a consequence, he made a strong appeal to the lively imagination of the time and was made the first candidate of the new Republican party. Frémont was an attractive figure in many respects but if we would evaluate him correctly we should remove his halo of myth and romance and forget the lines which the poet Whittier indited to him during the anti-slavery crusade.

Professor Schlesinger, a thoughtful and discriminating historian, calls attention to one phase of the problem which should not be overlooked in this connection. "Buchanan was at this time," he says, "nearly seventy years of age, by nature timid, and long accustomed to view public questions through Southern spectacles. Dreading the thought of taking any action likely to precipitate a civil war, he no doubt felt an obligation to keep things in an unchanged condition until the new administration took hold."<sup>1</sup> It is entirely pos-

<sup>1</sup> *Political and Social History of the United States*, p. 174.

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sible also that the response to Lincoln's call in 1861 was more pronounced because Buchanan had exhausted every resource to maintain the peace of the Nation. It should also be said that, when the die was cast, Buchanan threw his influence promptly and unreservedly to the cause of the Union. When Fort Sumter was fired upon he wrote to a member of the new Cabinet: "The North will sustain the administration almost to a man, and it ought to be sustained at all hazards." Franklin Pierce took the same stand, although he, as well as Buchanan, had been freely termed a "doughface" in the angry discussions of the period.

Dr. H. W. Elson, a man of sound historical judgment, also adds a word of caution to those who would condemn the President's cause without reservation. While Buchanan, he writes, was never "capable of standing out for a principle," and for his pro-slavery attitude in Kansas he "stands unforgiven at the bar of history," yet "for his action in this great crisis near the close of his public

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life, the unprejudiced American must deal gently with his memory.”<sup>1</sup> One is inclined to do this as, on March 4, 1861, he views James Buchanan, a beaten yet sincere man, broken in body and dejected in spirit, as he “sadly tottered out into the shadows” after forty years of public service.

To sum up, then, two of the nine Presidents of this period—Jackson and Van Buren—have been generally underestimated; two—Harrison and Taylor—were military heroes; two others—Tyler and Fillmore—were accidents, somewhat distressing but not fatal in character, and the remaining three—Polk, Pierce, and Buchanan—were, it must be admitted, rather commonplace men for the high office of the Presidency. Polk was an obscure man, a compromise candidate, and the strongest point in his favor was his advocacy of the annexation of Texas. Pierce was also a “dark horse” and his nomination quite took away the breath of Stephen A. Douglas. “Alas!” he remarked, “from this time forth no private

<sup>1</sup> *History of the United States*, p. 634-5.

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citizen is safe." Buchanan was the strongest and best known of the three and has been, I think, blamed over much for his inaction during the closing years of his administration. As a matter of fact, the people were as spineless as their leaders. The leaders reflected the people. Slavery was the football of politics and the people were not inclined to meet the issue courageously. They insisted on running away from their trouble and, as a result, multiplied their misfortunes. On the whole, this was a rather inglorious period of our history. It was a tonic to the Nation when a real leader and a masterful personality took the presidential chair. Abraham Lincoln came to an afflicted Nation "with healing in his wings" but the Republic was destined to "walk through the valley of the shadow of death" for four long years before becoming conscious of its own deliverance.





**FROM LINCOLN TO COOLIDGE**



## CHAPTER III

### FROM LINCOLN TO COOLIDGE

#### LINCOLN

THE Presidents of the United States may, roughly speaking, be divided into three classes, considering Jackson and Lincoln as dividing lines. The men of greatest ability fall in the first class—from Washington to Jackson; those of the least ability in the second class—from Jackson to Lincoln; while the Presidents since Lincoln occupy an intermediate position.

Lincoln was, by common consent, the ablest of the Presidents with the possible exception of the first, and some would not even except Washington. Upon this point of contention, however, let us not tarry. Such comparisons at best are rather ungracious, and in this particular case are of little avail on account of the marked dissimilarity between the two men. Lincoln was unlike other men.

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He has been called "the most individual man who ever lived." Comparisons with other public men are thus made difficult. It is well-nigh futile to philosophize about the personality of Lincoln, and this for two reasons which at first thought seem paradoxical. In the first place, little can be added to the world's knowledge of his career, and in the second place, he is as yet an unsolved mystery. His history has been studied with greater zeal than the history of any other American. In 1909, his centenary year, every scrap of available information, touching upon his career or personality, was eagerly sought after and carefully scrutinized. And yet we do not fully know and understand the man. At the close of a learned and discriminating biography Mr. John T. Morse remarks: "But Lincoln stands apart in striking solitude,—an enigma to all men. . . . Let us be content with this fact. Let us take him simply as Abraham Lincoln, singular and solitary, as we all see that he was; let us be thankful if we can make a niche big enough for him among the world's

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heroes, without worrying ourselves about the proportion which it may bear to other niches; and there let him remain forever, lonely, as in his strange lifetime, impressive, mysterious, unmeasured, and unsolved."

The reading public is now familiar with every phase of Lincoln's career. The dramatic story of his life from the log cabin in Hardin County, Kentucky, to the final resting place in Springfield, Illinois, is the common property of mankind. To review it in this connection would be carrying coals to Newcastle. It might not be amiss, however, to make note of those characteristics and ideals which made Lincoln "the common heritage of all mankind" and which enabled him to impress his personality so indelibly upon the men of his time.

"In the first place, Lincoln was simply and transparently honest. His honesty was universal. Most men are financially honest, but Lincoln was honest in thought as well as in action—honest with himself and with others as well. It may seem strange in this day and

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age of the world to commend a man for mere honesty. We should be able perhaps to take honesty for granted. But the greatest need of the world today, in business and in politics, is a greater measure of good old-fashioned common honesty. . . .

“In the next place, Lincoln had the courage of his convictions. He could hew to the line and let the chips fall where they would. He was big enough and brave enough to stand alone. He did his own thinking, as William H. Seward discovered on more than one occasion. He was no compromiser. He used to say there was no point in groping about trying to find a middle ground between right and wrong.

“Many instances in his career will occur to the reader to verify these statements. Call to mind the ‘*Trent* Affair.’ Captain Wilkes had taken Mason and Slidell, the Confederate delegates, off the British steamer, the *Trent*. The whole country was ringing with his praises. The House of Representatives had eulogized him in a resolution. The Secretary

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of the Navy congratulated him and the Secretary of War praised him publicly. He was floating high on the wave of popular applause, when Lincoln gave the matter a sober second thought. He and Seward agreed that the delegates should be surrendered and an apology offered. 'It occurs to me,' he said, 'that it was against this same sort of thing that we fought in the War of 1812; and besides,' he added, 'one war at a time.'

"An incident which occurred in 1858 illustrates the same point. He expected to be nominated for the United States Senate against Stephen A. Douglas and he prepared his speech of acceptance with very great care. It was an important occasion and he submitted the document in advance to some of his political friends. It contained that now famous passage, 'A house divided against itself can not stand.' His friends were amazed at the bold utterance and all except Herndon besought him to change the tone and temper of the paragraph. He refused. He said the statement was true and timely and that he



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would prefer to go down to defeat upon that platform rather than be victorious on any other. On the following day the passage was delivered without the change of a single syllable. As James G. Blaine once remarked, Lincoln never said the thing which was best for that day's debate but rather 'the thing which would stand the test of time and square itself with eternal justice.'

"The same spirit was to the fore when a draft law was being urged. His timorous friends again said that it would ruin his political prospects. He cut the Gordian knot with his bold reply, 'What is the Presidency worth to me if I lose my country?'

"Again you will search Lincoln's acts and writings in vain for any trace of vindictiveness. He was broad-minded and liberal in his dealings with men. His acts were determined by the demands of the public welfare rather than by personal considerations. When he was considering Edwin M. Stanton for a place in the Cabinet some of his friends reminded him that Stanton had criticized his

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policies severely and had insulted him personally in the trial of a law case in Cincinnati. This was all true, but Lincoln had come to the conclusion that Stanton was the best man available for the war post and he was accordingly appointed. Subsequent events proved that Lincoln's judgment was sound. Stanton was rather hard to live with but as a secretary he was most efficient.

"Salmon P. Chase had been pettishly critical of Lincoln and his policies, and when he was being considered for the position of Chief Justice of the Supreme Court the busybodies again poured a combination of fact and rumor into the ear of the President. Chase had been unreasonably obnoxious, but Lincoln considered him the best man for the position and made the appointment.

"In the first inaugural address, from the beginning to the end, Lincoln pleads with the people of the South as an indulgent father might plead with a stubborn and wayward child. He was being grossly maligned at the time but there was no retaliation in kind.

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He counseled 'sweet reasonableness' and the sober second thought. 'My countrymen, one and all,' he pleaded, 'think calmly and well upon this whole subject. . . . In your hands, my dissatisfied countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. The government will not assail you.' In all of this, however, there was no mistaking his attitude. 'Plainly,' he remarked pointedly, 'the central idea of secession is the essence of anarchy.'

"It should not be inferred, however, from what has been said, that Lincoln was an impractical idealist. He had his ideals but he never broke contact with practicality. His head was in the clouds but his feet were always firmly planted on mother earth. He was a man of vision. He took a long view of things and never failed to grasp the great central and important fact. He was not confused by non-essentials. When he was told that Grant was drunk at the battle of Shiloh he remarked, 'I would like to know the brand of Grant's whisky in order that I might get some of the

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same kind for the other commanders. I can't spare this man; he fights.'

"Lincoln was also a pronounced exponent of the sober second thought. When he had thought a matter through he was confident of his conclusions. 'My path,' he said, 'is as plain as a turn pike road. It is marked out for me by the Constitution. I am in no doubt which way to go.' He did not come to conclusions quickly but when he did, he was, as Schuyler Colfax once remarked, 'almost as immovable as the eternal hills.'

"Perhaps the most pronounced traits in the character of Abraham Lincoln were his broad charity and unbounded sympathy. These traits stand out prominently in everything he ever said or did and carry a significant message to a troubled world.

"These qualities of mind and heart naturally connote the leader. Lincoln was a man of consummate leadership. Richard Watson Gilder in his essay on Lincoln attributes much of this leadership to his effective use of the English language. Lincoln was a real genius

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in the use of the written and the spoken word. It is commonly said that no man can be a successful Prime Minister of England without the gift of convincing speech. This is undoubtedly true and this is possibly the chief reason why the premiership of Stanley Baldwin is only moderately successful. Mr. Baldwin finds great difficulty in putting his plans and purposes lucidly and pointedly before Parliament and the people, whereas Lincoln 'spoke with all the power and wisdom of the ancient parables.'

"If we listen intently we can hear his soulful and tender words as they come down to us in gentle cadences through the passing years. They reveal the great heart and soul of Abraham Lincoln.

As long as I have been here I have never knowingly planted a thorn in any man's bosom . . .

Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may soon pass away . . .

With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, . . . let us do all which may

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achieve and cherish a just and a lasting pathy among ourselves, and with all nations. her

We here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain . . .

I am loath to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break, our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when touched again, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.

“The late Lord Curzon, in a review of parliamentary eloquence, once remarked that the three supreme masterpieces of oratory in the English language are a short response by William Pitt, and the Gettysburg Address and the Second Inaugural Address by Abraham Lincoln. He says in conclusion, ‘I escape the task of deciding which is the masterpiece of modern English eloquence by awarding the prize to an American.’”<sup>1/</sup>

<sup>1</sup>T. F. Moran, *Character and Ideals of Abraham Lincoln*, Lincoln Day Address delivered before the Indiana General Assembly, 1927.

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in the yet a pity it is that Abraham Lincoln It is not spared to finish his chosen work, and to apply his mind and heart to the problems of Reconstruction. The country might have been spared a distressing chapter in its history.

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It is, of course, too early to venture anything but a tentative opinion in regard to the Presidents since Lincoln's time; and yet there are some facts which seem quite definitely settled and a few personal characteristics which appear to be unmistakable.

Andrew Johnson seems from this distance to have been a narrow-minded, stubborn man of strong personality. He was the natural product of his heredity and environment. Apprenticed to a tailor at ten, he was taught the alphabet by his fellow workmen and later learned to read almost unaided. His wife taught him to write but he was never able to use the pen with ease until he had been in Congress. As the "Mechanic Governor" of

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Tennessee, he showed a natural sympathy with the working classes; and as a member of the United States Senate he assailed secession and the South with a virulence almost unparalleled. It was his unionism and his geographical location rather than his ability or achievements which placed him on the Republican ticket with Lincoln in 1864. He had always been a Democrat and in his letter of acceptance he disclaimed any departure from Democratic principles; but accepted the nomination, as he put it, upon the ground of "the higher duty of first preserving the government."

The principal events in Johnson's administration had to do with the running fight on Reconstruction. The Union was broken and had to be restored. Men differed in regard to the proper methods of accomplishing this end. The monumental figure of Lincoln had passed away, and men of smaller ability and more restricted vision were grappling with the problem. Johnson put forward the "Presidential Plan," or "My Plan," as he ego-



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tistically called it; while Charles Sumner and Thaddeus Stevens formulated the "Congressional Plan." The former was fairly lenient and reasonable, while the latter was "thorough" and punitive. The contest was a bitter one. Personalities abounded. Johnson made his famous "swing around the circle" during the campaign of 1866 and abused Congress in a coarse and vulgar way. He would even "hang old Thad Stevens."

Stevens and Sumner retaliated in kind. Stevens referred to Johnson as "a drunken tailor," and Sumner called him "utterly unprincipled and vicious" and pronounced him a menace to the country. It was impossible for wise action to emerge from such a psychological state as this.

Right here the fine spirit and the "sweet reasonableness" of Abraham Lincoln were sorely missed. Lincoln had remarked: "We must extinguish our resentments if we expect harmony and union. There is too much of the desire on the part of our very good friends to be master, to interfere with and dictate to

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those States, to treat the people not as fellow citizens; there is too little respect for their rights, I do not sympathize in these feelings.”

As a matter of fact, there was no fundamental difference between Lincoln's general plan and that of Andrew Johnson, but between the ability, the tact, and the spirit of the two men there was an awful chasm.

As a result of these personal contentions and bitter recriminations, aroused and intensified by the small caliber of the President, the administration of Andrew Johnson may be looked upon as the low-water mark of the Presidency.

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General Grant was the most famous man to occupy the presidential office in this latter period. Although distinctively a military man, he was by no means unskilled in statecraft. In fact, he was remarkably successful as an executive, considering his lack of preparation for the Presidency. Up to the time of his nomination in 1868 he had never taken any ac-

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tive part in politics and had voted for only one presidential candidate—James Buchanan—a Democrat. In early life he had had some affiliation with the Whigs, but had never been a pronounced party man; indeed, several prominent Democratic leaders had interviewed him in regard to accepting the Democratic nomination for the Presidency only a short time before he was nominated by the Republicans. The decisiveness of his military temperament made him an efficient executive in some respects, but his unbounded faith in his friends and in the integrity of his appointees led to several governmental scandals during his administration. Absolutely honest himself, he was slow to suspect others, and in more than one instance he shut the door with a bang and locked it after the horse had been stolen. As General Horace Porter once remarked: "Wherever he placed trust he reposed rare confidence, until it was shaken by actual proofs of betrayal. This characteristic of his nature led him at times to be imposed upon by those who were not worthy of the

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faith he placed in them; but persons that once lost his confidence never regained it."

When thoroughly aroused he could lash the money changers from the temple. In 1875, for example, it became evident that several government officials were putting their hands into the funds collected from the manufacture of whisky. President Grant issued a vigorous order for their arrest and prosecution, closing the document with the famous words: "Let no guilty man escape." Some of the offenders were powerful in politics and had influential friends but these facts did not save them from the prison bars. Grant purged the revenue service and, as is usually the case, was grossly maligned as his reward. These misrepresentations, however, did not lessen his popularity either at home or abroad. Only a short time after this episode he started upon his tour of the world and was accorded such receptions as had never been given to any other man. His wife went with him on his journey and later remarked that "having learned a lesson from her predecessor, Penelope, she accom-

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panied her Ulysses in his wanderings around the world."

General Grant's career was a two-sided one—a failure followed by a conspicuous success. Grant was a "Buckeye." He was born in Point Pleasant, Ohio, and spent many of his boyhood days in Georgetown in the same State. His family lived in humble but comfortable circumstances, while he himself "lent a hand" in the work of the farm and tannery.

He was graduated in due time from the United States Military Academy where his record as a student was by no means a brilliant one. He remained in the army for a time, served in the Mexican War, and finally resigned his commission.

Things did not go well with him. His health and habits were none too good and his business ventures did not prosper. He was decidedly "down at the heel" and his rude log cabin in the wilderness was very appropriately named "Hardscrabble." His own and his wife's family had come to look upon him as a failure. He looked the part. He was

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shiftless, shabby and dejected. He was almost "down and out" when the Civil War came on. He then found himself. That struggle gave him a new lease on life and he emerged from the war the most heroic figure in America.

His Presidency, however, represents a dip in the curve. This was partly due to the times and partly to his own inadequacy. The world has now come to expect a period of corruption in business and politics in the backwash of every great war. Doctor Lingley tells us that "one of the characteristics of the decade after the Civil War was the widespread corruption in political and commercial life." The same condition of things obtained in the period after the World War—and still persists, apparently. As we look back over these two eras it must be evident that Presidents Grant and Harding—both honest men—were not the best qualified to combat the forces of evil in post-war periods.

It was in Grant's time that the "Credit Mobilier" of America was organized and "be-

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came a byword in our history." Two members of the House of Representatives were found guilty of receiving indirect bribes. The scandal also drew its sinister trail across the reputations of several other men in high office, including the Vice-President of the United States and a man who later became President.

"The whisky ring episode was the next in order. The Secretary of the Treasury discovered that a small coterie of revenue officers, in collusion with certain distillers, were defrauding the government of large sums of money. In this case the trail led up to the Private Secretary of the President and it was in connection with this disclosure that Grant penned his famous *dictum*, 'Let no guilty man escape.' It should be said, however, by way of parenthesis, that Grant's attitude in the trial of his Secretary was instrumental in allowing an apparently guilty man to escape just punishment for his criminal acts.

"Grant himself, however, was never implicated personally in any of these financial ir-

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regularities. On the whole, history has accepted the verdict of Judge E. Rockwood Hoar, an acute, hardheaded man who at one time was Attorney-General in Grant's Cabinet. Judge Hoar believed Grant 'strictly and absolutely honest.' When he was asked, 'Do you feel sure that in all these suspicious transactions no money stuck to his fingers?' his reply was, 'I would as soon think St. Paul got some of the thirty pieces of silver.' 'But,' he added with truth, 'Grant kept much bad company and made a pretty poor President.' Grant was not a discriminating judge of the motives of men and was duped too often by those who should have been his loyal supporters.

"It was in Grant's time also that the Secretary of War, General W. W. Belknap, sold a lucrative position for certain sums of money to be paid at periodical intervals to Mrs. Belknap and himself. Five judges were driven from the bench and members of the Committee on Military Affairs were selling appointments to West Point. Taking all these things



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into consideration, James Ford Rhodes is probably not far wrong when he says, 'The high water mark of corruption in national affairs was reached during Grant's two administrations.' Lowell in his poem entitled, 'The World's Fair, 1876,' is no less severe."<sup>1</sup>

General Grant was a great man but not a great President. His Presidency was, in fact, an anticlimax to an otherwise brilliant career. Admiring friends and ambitious party leaders have not been fair in every instance to our military heroes. They have often placed them in false positions. They have elected them to offices which they were not qualified to fill. They have, thoughtlessly perhaps, capitalized their prestige without a due consideration of the effect upon the man himself. Grant's efforts for a third term, under the tutelage of Roscoe Conkling and other designing politicians, were little less than pathetic.

<sup>1</sup> T. F. Moran, Address, *Ethics of Politics*, delivered before the Phi Beta Kappa Club of Purdue University.

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Rutherford B. Hayes is not usually thought of as one of the great Presidents and perhaps should not be so considered; and yet I have a feeling that in the future his name will be written much larger than it is at the present time. Conditions have not been favorable for an early recognition of his excellencies. Blaine, and not he, was the leading candidate for the Republican nomination in 1876, and the dispute over his election has hung like a dark cloud over his administration. Hayes was, nevertheless, one of the best of men and an able man in addition. With him a new era in American history begins—the period of the United Nation. The country had just emerged from the dark shadows of the Civil War, and the so-called “Southern Question” had appeared for the last time in American politics in the election of 1876. An era of peace and good will was beginning and Hayes was just the man to take the lead. Being of a conciliatory disposition, he appointed David M. Key, a

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Democrat and former Confederate soldier, to a place in his Cabinet, and one of the first acts of his administration was to recall the troops from the Southern States. He was also a tower of strength to the cause of Civil Service Reform and his pithy epigram, "he serves his party best who serves his country best," has been quoted thousands of times by civil service reformers.

Although a man of conciliatory temperament he also had the courage of his convictions. This fact was evident when he removed certain powerful men in his own party because they were using their offices to manage and control political affairs rather than in the service of the people. He also sent a clear and blunt statement of the facts to the Senate in a special message. Chester A. Arthur was one of the officials thus removed.

In another instance and at an earlier date he gave evidence of his patriotism and high sense of duty. During the war he was nominated by one of the Ohio districts for a seat in the House of Representatives. He was in the

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field at the time and one of his friends suggested that he get a leave of absence from the army for the purpose of making a canvass of the district. His reply was this: "Your suggestion about getting a furlough to take the stump was certainly made without reflection. An officer, fit for duty, who at this crisis would abandon his post to electioneer for a seat in Congress, ought to be scalped." He remained at his post of duty and was elected by a majority of twenty-four hundred.

What President Hayes *was* is really more important than what he did. The late Carl Schurz was one of many to testify to his moral worth. Mr. Schurz was Secretary of the Interior in Mr. Hayes's Cabinet and consequently knew him in an intimate way. "The uprightness of his character," said Mr. Schurz, "and the exquisite purity of his life, public as well as domestic, exercised a conspicuously wholesome influence, not only upon the *personnel* of the governmental machinery, but also upon the social atmosphere of the national capital while he occupied the White House." In the

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words of a noted preacher, "purity has been the crowning quality of all the epoch-making men." It may be too much to claim that Rutherford B. Hayes was an epoch-making man, but that he was pure in thought and act no one can deny.

Hayes was not a great or a brilliant man but his administration was a successful one from every point of view. It commanded the confidence and respect of the entire country. Force was no longer resorted to in the South; the scandals ceased; specie payment was resumed; and balm was applied to party feuds. His most notable achievement, however, was in the field of Civil Service Reform. With him the Civil Service was a passion and a religion. "Party leaders," he said, "should have no more influence in appointments than other equally respectable citizens. No assessments for political purposes on officers or subordinates should be allowed. No useless officer or employee should be retained. No officer should be required or permitted to take part in the management of political organiza-

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tions, caucuses, conventions or election campaigns." It is needless to say that such words as these did not endear him to the hearts of Blaine, Conkling, Morton, Butler, Logan and the other spoilsmen both in and outside of his party. But the President stood by his guns and had the active support of John Sherman in his war on the New York bosses.

Hayes was not a candidate for a second term and retired on March 4, 1881, with the admiration and respect of all men. He had lived up to the appellation which Oliver Wendell Holmes attached to him at the Harvard Commencement in 1877 when he greeted him as "His Honesty, the President."

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James A. Garfield, the successor of Mr. Hayes in the presidential office, was a man of fine personality and good ability whose career was cut short by his tragic death. He held office for only six and a half months, and during two and a half months of this period he was almost wholly incapacitated for official serv-

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ice. He has, therefore, no record by which his ability as a chief executive may be safely judged.

An estimate of Garfield as a public man presents unusual difficulties. A brief survey of the facts relating to his career will assist us in forming the background for an opinion.

Garfield was born in Ohio in 1831 and died fifty years later. He spent his early days in the country and on the towpath of a canal, but not in the dire poverty portrayed by the sentimentalists. He was educated in Hiram College, Ohio, and Williams College, Massachusetts, where President Mark Hopkins made an indelible impression upon him. He remained a wide reader and a careful student all his days but was never a constructive or an original thinker. He was, when a young man, a preacher in the Disciples Church and exhibited an unfortunate bigotry which he later outgrew.

He became a teacher and was elected a member of the Ohio State legislature. Later he was nominally, though not really, a lawyer. He had little preparation for the profession

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and practiced only incidentally. He was one of the most effective speakers of his day and his *Diary* discloses in numerous instances that he harbored no little vanity in this connection.

He was in military service in the Civil War for about two years. His record was good, but not outstanding. He was elected to a seat in the National House in 1862, and resigned his commission in the following year to assume his legislative duties. He was never happy in the army. He chafed under the red tape and found the restrictions irksome. He had no respect for West Pointers and, in a moment of disgust, declared the regular army "as rotten as corruption can make it." If the country should perish, he said, its epitaph should be, "Died of West Point." It is interesting to note that he changed his views completely and, at a later time, eulogized the graduates of the Military Academy.

He was a member of the House for seventeen years and it was there that he made his only complete record. As a committee chairman he was industrious and effective. As a



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debater he had few equals. As a parliamentary leader he was strong but not in the same class with Clay, Douglas, Stevens, and Blaine.

He was not a good judge of men; on the contrary, he was somewhat obtuse in this respect. He was sometimes right, but often wrong. His estimates of his contemporaries were often absurd and sometimes whimsical. For example, he persistently underrated Lincoln. He didn't understand him. He thought him weak and looked for his defeat in 1864. He saw things differently later. Grant, in his mind, was "utterly unfitted for office" and he was opposed to his renomination in 1872. He also revised this opinion somewhat at a later time, but never had much in common with the "Silent General." McClellan was "weakly and wickedly conservative," and "the President nearly as bad." Salmon P. Chase at one time was "the leading American statesman." He recanted later. He was intimately associated with John Sherman but did "not admire the statesmanship or the courage of the Senator." He did not under-

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stand Hayes. He never appreciated his true worth and predicted the failure of his administration. Blaine he never fully trusted. He knew him well, recognized his ability, and made him the head of his Cabinet; yet he looked upon him as "tricky" and "too much given to intrigue." He had a sure eye, however, for the Conklings, Platts, Logans, Camerons, Butlers and other machine politicians of the time. He estimated them at their true worth—which was far below their face value.

In wading through the two ponderous volumes of his *Life and Letters*<sup>1</sup> and noting his changes of position one can readily see why he gave his contemporaries an impression of weakness and vacillation. His opinions need to be dated. In fact, like many other public men, he had at times two different sets of opinions, the one private and personal and the other official.

In his writings he also gives, in some instances, an impression of narrowness. He was

<sup>1</sup>Theodore Clarke Smith, *James Abram Garfield, Life and Letters*.

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a tireless student but he lagged behind the times on some important matters. Perhaps it was his frontier training that prevented him from seeing the value of scientific instruction in agriculture. "I do not believe in a college to educate men for the profession of farming," he said, when the interests of the Land Grant Colleges were before the House of Representatives.

Garfield's name was rather unpleasantly connected with the "Credit Mobilier," the "Salary Grab," and some other political scandals of the time. Some critics have held him guilty. Others, prominent among whom is his official biographer, Professor Theodore Clarke Smith, hold him blameless. His own testimony is not convincing, and his silence on many occasions has undoubtedly prejudiced the public mind against him. His silence under specific charges has been interpreted in some quarters as evidence of guilt. As a matter of fact, it seems to me, the case has not been proved or disproved "beyond a reasonable doubt"—and may never be. The

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unfortunate affairs, however, have left their shadow. If Garfield were strictly honest in the "Credit Mobilier" affair his judgment was poor and he showed a lack of that ethical discrimination which should characterize the acts of public men. His memory was also weak and his logic defective. It should be said however—and this is important—that dishonesty in these cases would have been totally at variance with the ethical standards of his entire career. In the absence of positive proof he should have the benefit of the doubt.

In regard to his Presidency it seems to me unfair to judge him from a four months' service. Senator Shelby M. Cullom does this when he writes: "Garfield was not a strong executive officer. In the brief period in which he occupied the White House, he did not make a good President and in my judgment would never have made a good one. He vacillated in the disposition of his patronage. He was not at all fitted for the position of chief executive of the United States."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Fifty Years of Public Service*, p. 127.

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Senator Cullom was not alone in this expression of opinion. Other competent critics have expressed themselves to the same effect. And yet expressions of this kind savor of snap judgment. They have no real basis. A man in the presidential office but four months is certainly untried. And during those four months it must be said to President Garfield's credit that he stood out manfully against the "spoils" program of Senators Conkling and Platt and started the "Star Route" looters on the run.

In short, President Garfield had many sterling and manly qualities, but he was not a brilliant man and he lacked something of being a great man. He was certainly not a great President because he had never been thoroughly tested in the office. The people have loved him because his personality appealed to them and also because they looked upon him as a martyr to the cause of Civil Service Reform. Neither will they soon forget his ringing utterance in Madison Square Garden, New York, at the time of Lincoln's

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death, when he calmed an excited multitude with his now famous words: "Fellow-citizens! Clouds and darkness are round about Him! His pavilion is dark waters and thick clouds of the skies! Justice and judgment are the habitation of His throne! Mercy and truth shall go before his face! Fellow-citizens! God reigns and the government at Washington still lives."

James G. Blaine's eulogy of Garfield, delivered before the two Houses of Congress in February, 1882, is one of the finest pieces of writing of its kind to be found in all literature. I quote its famous peroration: "As the end drew near, his early craving for the sea returned. The stately mansion of power had been to him the wearisome hospital of pain, and he begged to be taken from its prison walls, from its oppressive, stifling air, from its homelessness and its hopelessness. Gently, silently, the love of a great people bore the pale sufferer to the longed-for healing of the sea, to live or to die as God should will, within sight of its heaving billows, within

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sound of its manifold voices. With wan, fevered face tenderly lifted to the cooling breeze, he looked out wistfully upon the ocean's changing wonders; on its far sails whitening in the morning light; on its restless waves, rolling shoreward to break and die beneath the noonday sun; on the red clouds of evening arching low to the horizon; on the serene and shining pathway of the stars. Let us think that his dying eyes read a mystic meaning which only the rapt and parting soul may know. Let us believe that in the silence of the receding world he heard the great waves breaking on a farther shore, and felt already upon his wasted brow the breath of the eternal morning."

### ARTHUR

Mr. Garfield's successor in the presidential office was Chester A. Arthur, a machine politician, whose nomination for the Vice-Presidency had been made, not upon the basis of merit, but as a concession to the Grant adherents and the New York "Stal-

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warts" who had opposed Garfield's nomination so strenuously. Arthur's nomination was looked upon in many quarters as a brazen bit of political affrontery. Some took it jocularly and others seriously. John Sherman wrote at the time: "The nomination of Arthur is a ridiculous burlesque. . . . It attaches to the ticket all the odium of machine politics and will greatly endanger the success of Garfield. I cannot but wonder how a convention, even in the heat and hurry of the closing scenes, could make such a blunder."

When he became President, the consternation was still greater. Arthur was hailed as the "pothouse politician." He was remembered as the man whom President Hayes had removed from office for cause. "Chet Arthur President of the United States! Good God!" gasped one of his contemporaries as soon as he recovered his breath. The assassination of Garfield now seemed a twofold calamity.

The new President, however, had a surprise in store for his critics. He showed a surprising reversal of form. He changed front



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almost overnight and rose splendidly to meet the responsibilities of his office. He put aside both the methods and, to a large extent, the associates of his former days. He brought an unexpected dignity to the office. He was a large and handsome man, familiar with the best forms of New York club life, the best dressed man in Washington, with all the hall-marks of a correct gentleman. As a result of all this, combined with a fund of common sense and worldly wisdom, he gave the country a conservative and dignified, if not an aggressive, administration. He was successful to a greater degree than any of the Vice-Presidents who, prior to his time, had succeeded to the Presidency. At the close of his term he was a formidable candidate for the Republican nomination to succeed himself, but was compelled to dip his colors to the "Plumed Knight."

It is perhaps worth noting that the most important single piece of legislation enacted during his term of office was the Pendleton Civil Service Act of 1883. This Act has been

## ARTHUR

called by a competent historian "one of the finest pieces of legislation ever put upon our statute books"; and Ostrogorski, the noted authority on political institutions, has pronounced it "the Magna Charta of Civil Service Reform." It ran counter to the political principles of Arthur's whole life prior to his accession to the Presidency, and it seems the irony of fate that he should have been called upon to preside over its passage. The politicians, interested in the loaves and fishes, sneered at it as the "Snivel Service Act," while thirty-three Senators and eighty-seven Representatives "revealed their time-serving timidity by refusing to vote" one way or the other. The President, however, gave the measure his sympathy, his influence, and his signature; and in due time he appointed Dorman B. Eaton, the author of the bill, to the chairmanship of the new Civil Service Commission.

Chester A. Arthur was neither a great President nor a great man, but the presidential office brought out the best that was

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within him and in this respect he should be remembered with gratitude by posterity.

### CLEVELAND

Grover Cleveland, the only Democratic President since the Civil War, aside from President Wilson, was, I think, the strongest and most useful executive from Lincoln to Roosevelt. Mr. Cleveland was not a man of fine fiber; neither did he possess that delicate sense of the proprieties which characterized some other Presidents; yet he was a man of sound judgment, bold initiative, splendid courage, and robust honesty. His administrations were vigorous, wholesome, and business-like and his policies were far-sighted. He was roundly abused by both political parties during his lifetime, but in more recent years public opinion has been drifting, slowly but surely, toward his attitude on pensions, Civil Service Reform, money, the Monroe Doctrine and, to a certain extent, the tariff.

Mr. Cleveland's background is interesting and illuminating. He was born in Caldwell,



*Photograph by Brown Brothers*

GROVER CLEVELAND



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New Jersey, in 1837, and died in Princeton in the same State in 1908. His nationality was a mixture of English, French, and Irish elements. His father was a cultured man, a Presbyterian minister and a Yale graduate. Both of his parents were strong and independent characters and the young boy was reared under the rigidity of a puritanical *régime*. He tells us that he was sometimes called out of a warm bed in the winter season to hang up his hat or other article of clothing which he had carelessly left lying out of place.

He attended the common schools where he got on only fairly well. "As a student he did not shine." His biographer tells us that he made friends more readily than grades. He was ambitious, however, and had visions of a college education, but the fact that there were nine children in the family and an income of only six hundred dollars per year seemed to preclude that possibility.

In order to supplement the family treasury the young Grover took a position as clerk in a country store. This was in western New

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York where his father had accepted a call as pastor of the village church. His work was hard, his hours long, and his wages small. He lived with another boy in a bleak and desolate room almost destitute of furnishings. It was his custom to rise in the morning before daybreak and wash his hands and face in the horse trough under the town pump in front of the store. He then went to the store, built the fire, swept and dusted, and then waited for the coming of customers.

Next we find him a struggling young lawyer in Buffalo. Here his integrity and force of character soon made an impression and he was elected sheriff of Erie County. He performed his duties conscientiously, even manipulating the machinery for the execution of criminals with his own hands. He was then elected mayor of Buffalo on a reform ticket. Again he mixed his character with his business and was known as "the veto mayor." The politicians marveled because he actually let contracts to the lowest bidders. This was a decided innovation. He was then elected

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Governor of New York and again astounded the politicians by throwing down the bars with an order to "admit anyone at once who asks to see the Governor." His strikingly successful administration of the affairs of the State of New York made him a national character and placed him in line for the presidential nomination on the Democratic ticket.

Mr. Cleveland was now forty-five years of age with his character and powers fully developed. Harry Thurston Peck in his brilliant book entitled *Twenty Years of the Republic* remarks: "He had all the virile attributes of a Puritan ancestry. His will was inflexible. His force of character was extraordinary. He hated shams, believed that a thing was either right or wrong, and when he had made up his mind to any course of action, he carried it through without so much as a moment's wavering. . . . The rough, blunt independence of the man made him indifferent to the insidious influences that rise like a malarial mist about the possessor of high political office. Subtleties of suggestion were



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lost on this brusque novice, and anything more pointed than suggestion roused in him a cross-grained spirit that brooked no guidance or control. He forged ahead in his own way with a sort of bull-necked stubbornness, but with a power and energy which smoother politicians were compelled to recognize as very real.”<sup>1</sup>

It should be remembered, however, that these robust qualities carried with them, almost of necessity, certain elements of weakness. Cleveland had “the defects of his qualities.” One of these was an element of narrowness and arrogance in dealing with the leaders of his own party. Men said that Vice-President Hendricks was an abler man than the President, and the latter seemed to resent this fact and to hold Mr. Hendricks responsible for its currency. Daniel Manning was the Warwick most instrumental in making Cleveland Governor and President, and men naturally thought him in line for presidential favors; but Cleveland appointed Manning’s deadly enemy to the postmastership at Al-

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bany, the home town of his friend. Samuel J. Tilden was looked upon as the "power behind the throne" in the Democratic party, but Cleveland saw to it that he was a Samson shorn of his locks. All of this seemed to indicate littleness in an otherwise big man. His enemies went so far as to say that the President was a small man everywhere—except on the hay-scales.

Cleveland never carried his heart on his sleeve and was quite generally misjudged by his contemporaries, particularly in the early part of his career. As a young bachelor in Buffalo the height of his social ambition seemed to be to play pinochle in a secluded corner of a beer garden with a few boon companions. There was also a moral blot on his early life which he acknowledged and for which he made atonement, but which his political enemies chose not to forget. They preferred to advertise him in his political campaigns as a social leper. People have now come to see that this moral defect was incidental and not typical.

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Cleveland had two admirable qualities which on account of his reticence were not known to the general public. In the first place, he was sincerely and intensely religious. Evidence of this appears over and over again in his letters to members of his family and to a few intimate friends.

Again he had a warm heart beneath a brusque exterior. His devotion to his mother and to his family was beautiful and tender. On the day of his election to the Governorship of New York he wrote an intimate letter to his brother in which he made a loving reference to his mother who had recently passed away. "Do you know," he said, "if mother were alive I would feel so much safer? I have always thought her prayers had much to do with my success." In another instance he speaks of "the desolation of a life without a mother's prayers," and later, when he was present at President McKinley's inauguration, he said he envied him only in one respect and that was that his mother was present to see him take the oath of office. These finer

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and softer traits of character embedded beneath a rugged exterior were little dreamed of by the masses of the people at this time.

The nomination of a man of this character would be permitted by the politicians only over their dead bodies. The Tammany tiger snarled and was flouted. Tammany leaders talked of agreement and compromise, but Cleveland would have none of it and said curtly, "Get thee behind me." And when the Tammany braves and other spoilsmen assailed him in the national convention, Governor Edward S. Bragg hurled his defiance at them in the famous sentence, "We love him for the enemies he has made."

James G. Blaine was the opposing candidate and the campaign which followed was called by Andrew D. White the vilest ever waged. Harry Thurston Peck said "it was a debauch of slander." "From that moment," he writes, "the contest became shameful and indecent to an almost incredible degree. No such campaign of slander had ever before been waged. One is justified in thinking that

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no such campaign will ever again be known in American political history." Blaine's private life was flawless while his public career was vulnerable. Cleveland's private life had one dark spot but his public life was above reproach. During the campaign the public and private lives of both candidates were smeared with the foulest slime of dirty politics. One is amazed that the press and presumably reputable campaign speakers could descend so low. As a fitting climax to this flood of billingsgate the Reverend Mr. Burchard delivered his famous "Rum, Romanism and Rebellion" speech in favor of Blaine and elected Cleveland.

President Cleveland in due time established himself in the White House. Things were rather primitive in those days. The President had no stenographer but wrote his letters with his own hand. There was but one telephone in the presidential mansion. There was a steward, William, who ruled the situation with a rod of iron. On one occasion he put out a shabby dress suit for the President to wear at a formal White House dinner. The

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President asked William for a better one, to which the latter replied, "It's plenty good enough for the occasion." He had scrutinized the guests upon their arrival.

The new President had definite convictions on every subject. He was particularly positive in his views on the tariff problem. He opposed a high protective tariff and favored a tariff for revenue. He devoted his entire message of December, 1887, to an exposition of his views on this subject.

He was equally positive in regard to pensions. He felt that the pension laws of the United States were extremely liberal and that the man who could not qualify under them was probably not entitled to a pension. He consequently looked with suspicion upon all private bills which came to his desk for his signature and he was apparently justified in so doing. He said, "I have always considered the pension list a roll of honor"; but it would have been anything but a roll of honor if the President had signed all the private bills passed by Congress. Some of the claimants

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were found upon investigation to have been deserters; others had never enlisted at all. One of those who enlisted and immediately deserted was commended by a congressional committee for his "high character and long and faithful service." Mr. Peck remarks in this connection: "One had fallen while getting over a fence, but had absolutely no trace of injury upon his person. Another asked for a pension because he had hurt his ankle while *intending* to enlist. Another based his application upon the fact that, sixteen years after the conclusion of the war, he had fallen from a ladder and fractured his skull. Still another had broken his leg in a ditch while gathering dandelions long after the war. A widow asked for a pension because her husband had died of heart disease in 1881—a circumstance which she ascribed to a wound in his ankle received in 1863. . . . In all, he vetoed one pension bill in every seven, or about a hundred in the aggregate; and only one of these bills was ever passed over his veto." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pp. 91-92.

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To grant such pensions as these, Mr. Cleveland declared, would be "an insult to every decent veteran soldier." President Harrison later decried such close inspection of individual cases. He said this was no time "to be weighing the claims of the old soldiers with apothecaries' scales." "We are dealing with pensions," said Cleveland, "not gratuities."

President Cleveland was also sincerely devoted to the cause of Civil Service Reform; but, owing to a determined and selfish opposition, he was not able to accomplish as much as he had hoped to do. He was scarcely established in the White House when a hungry horde of office-seekers began their raid upon him. They invaded the White House, followed him to church, and flooded him with letters and telegrams. One of these early letters ran as follows:

### President Cleveland

It is verry dull out here. There is nothing to enliven things except the possibility of being impaled alive by a live Indian and I dont want to be impaled. I aint got any money to pay Rail



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Road fare and I want to get out of this. I thought if you could give me an office, I then could get a pass I voted the Republican ticket last fall but if you think there will be any chance of your being elected another term I will vote for you that is if I get an office.

The following letter apparently came from a forward-looking young man:

Dear Sir

I am a young man wich I would like to beter my self. The busines I am at is Junk business, but I would rather have the business in the govment, either in the Cabnet or as watchman

Another came from a man who apparently wished to husband his strength. It ran as follows:

Sur j would like to have the office of secetary j think j wold sute you j have a meligant desise all so j have the chills so j cant labor fur my liven. Send me the law so j will no what a secretary will bea.

Mr. Cleveland saw the humor in the situation but it nettled him nevertheless. In a letter to Charles Goodyear he said: "This

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dreadful, damnable office-seeking hangs over me and surrounds me." He repulsed the "pie hunters" so effectively that in the course of a few months the politicians were vowing that some day in the not distant future they would experience the rare delight of seeing the President's political "scalp drying in the sun." The President, however, kept on in the even tenor of his way. He seemed to think, as his biographer has suggested, that "in a fight his only use for a back was to put it against the wall."

During his Presidency the press made all sorts of fun of Mr. Cleveland's mode of literary expression. It was termed heavy, dull, and encyclopedic. The person who peruses his life and letters by Doctor Robert McElroy, however, will speedily come to the conclusion that he expressed himself in an unusually effective and incisive manner. When men told him that he was jeopardizing his chances for the presidential nomination by his frank utterances he exclaimed, "Damn the nomination; I will say what I think is right."

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And again he remarked, "What is the use of being elected or reëlected unless you stand for something?" When advised that he should do something more to advance his candidacy than he was doing he said he would not push "a self-seeking canvass for the presidential nomination," and in a letter to Richard Watson Gilder he wrote, "I care more for principle than for the Presidency." When he was told that he should answer his critics and defend his official actions his reply was: "I have done my duty as I saw it, and I feel that I need no defense." He emphasized fundamental principles as against mere notions. "Men and times change," he said, "but principles—never." He was also somewhat old-fashioned in his thinking and methods. "We can better afford," he said "to slacken our pace than to abandon our old simple American standards of honesty." His parting words, uttered upon his death bed, "I have tried so hard to do right," are typical of his whole career.

Elihu Root has called the Cleveland ad-

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ministrations "a new era" in American politics. "His official judgment," says Root, "was never disturbed by any question as to the effect upon his personal fortunes." His biographer, Doctor McElroy, tells us that "Grover Cleveland had the homely gift of common sense, the heroic gift of unflinching courage, the rare gift of long patience, and the divine gift of unimpeachable honesty." Taking these statements at their face value—they would not be subject to a large discount—one is inclined to be somewhat disappointed at the tangible and practical results of such a rare combination of qualities. As in the case of President Wilson, his achievements do not seem commensurate with his great ability and high character. The reason is not far to seek. He was tactless and intolerant and often found it impossible to work with other men. He antagonized Congress and retired from the Presidency a man without a party. All this his critics have pointed out is "an impeachment of his statesmanship." Harry Thurston Peck sums up the case of the critics

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against Mr. Cleveland in an admirable and graphic way although he does not accept the impeachment at its face value. "A great party leader, they say, must do his work with such instruments as he has at hand. A statesman who is worthy of the name will master difficulties, overcome obstacles, adapt his methods to his instruments, prevail by management, by tact, and by judicious compromise, until in the end he attains a lasting and complete success. He will make no unnecessary enemies. He will allow for prejudice, for human frailty of every kind, and he will not expect the walls of Jericho to fall at a single blast of his trumpet. The example of Lincoln is often cited as embodying the true art of statecraft; and his patience and genial wisdom are contrasted with Mr. Cleveland's blunt and robust tactlessness. Success, it is said, is the measure of a statesman's fame; and Mr. Cleveland did not achieve success."

Is it not unreasonable to expect a public man to be equally strong in all respects? No other man was ever thus constituted. Grover

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Cleveland made a distinctive contribution based on the talents which he possessed, and it is futile to philosophize about what he might have done had other talents been added unto him. He had the inevitable defects inherent in his own strong qualities. He was what he was and as such he did his work. He would have been greater no doubt had he possessed "Lincoln's tolerance and worldly wisdom," but an element of compromise in his nature might have vitiated his entire career. It certainly would not have been in harmony with his other qualities. It might have made a Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde combination. We should be thankful that he kept his rudder true and that he did his work with his own natural talents without pretending to qualities which he did not possess. "Not everyone can fight in Saul's armor."

Are Republics ungrateful? Not in the long run. They often seem to be for the moment but truth eventually comes uppermost. Abraham Lincoln has come unto his own. John Quincy Adams and Grover Cleveland are do-

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ing so. The reputation of Woodrow Wilson will follow the same course. The good which men do is not always interred with their bones.

### BENJAMIN HARRISON

Benjamin Harrison was President of the United States for only one term, and no event of unusual importance is connected with his administration; yet for intellectual power Mr. Harrison was probably not surpassed by any of his predecessors. The ninety-four impromptu speeches which he made during the campaign of 1888 and the one hundred and forty short addresses delivered in thirty-one days during his trip to the Pacific Coast and return are little less than marvels of their kind. The average *extempore* campaign speech in the United States is not an impressive utterance. It usually begins with a compliment, sometimes forced, to the people or the locality where the speech is being delivered. Then follows, perhaps, a mild pleasantry, more or less obvious in character. Next in order will come a few conventional phrases

## BENJAMIN HARRISON

and high-sounding platitudes. A fair modicum of buncombe, not a little claptrap, and perhaps a dash of demagoguery, prejudice, and partisanship are added to make an appearance of strength and to arouse enthusiasm. The orator tries to take himself seriously and so do his auditors, but none of us in our saner moments are profoundly impressed when we are told that our geese are all swans. What a striking contrast we find in Benjamin Harrison's short addresses! One marvels that the terse and polished sentences so heavily freighted with meaning and so appropriate to the audience and to the occasion could have been turned off with no apparent effort or preparation.

A man of Mr. Harrison's high intellectuality must of necessity be a man of positive convictions. This fact cropped out in the early part of his Presidency. There were those who freely predicted that Mr. Blaine, the Secretary of State, and not he, would be the real President of the United States. This delusion was quickly dispelled. While the President



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held himself aloof from the combat in a dignified way, it was he and not the members of his Cabinet who said the final and deciding word.

Harrison was a greater man than President. He did not have the temperament or the characteristics of a political leader. He lacked the magnetism of Clay and Blaine and the enthusiasm of Theodore Roosevelt. He could not inspire or attract. In fact, he repelled. A large amount of important legislation was enacted during his term of office but not much of it was due to his leadership. His theory of the functions of the President also differed from that of such men as Andrew Jackson and Theodore Roosevelt. He never encroached upon the legislative branch of the government.

Blaine made a splendid record as Secretary of State; Thomas B. Reed, though dubbed a "Czar," was an able and effective Speaker; while William McKinley, as chairman of the Ways and Means Committee and the apostle of high protection, was successful as a con-

## McKINLEY

gressional leader. These men were the active and potent forces as well as the conspicuous figures during the Harrison administration. They had the personal appeal which the dignified and austere President lacked; but no one can deny his intellectuality. The lapse of time will, in all probability, cause us to revise our estimates of the acts and capabilities of our recent Presidents, and I have a feeling that when Benjamin Harrison is viewed in his true historical perspective he will appear larger and more important than he now does.

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I do not feel, however, that the same will be true of President McKinley. His tragic and untimely death and more particularly his lovable personality and the purity of his life have given his contemporaries an exaggerated notion of his strength and importance as a public man. A sensitive man of excessive amiability and shrinking conservatism can hardly be expected to dominate affairs with

## FROM LINCOLN TO COOLIDGE

the bold initiative of a true leader. He naturally becomes a follower rather than a leader, an interpreter rather than a creator, of public opinion.

William McKinley was born in Ohio and was a student for a short time in Allegheny College, Pennsylvania. At the age of eighteen he enlisted for the Civil War as a private soldier and served under Rutherford B. Hayes who later became President. He was cited for courage and bravery in the Battle of Antietam and soon rose to the rank of Major. He left the army at the close of the war with a brilliant record.

He went back to his native State, became a teacher, lawyer, member of the National House of Representatives, and then Governor of Ohio. In 1896 he was nominated for the Presidency by the Republicans on a "sound money" platform, although he was a comparatively recent convert to the gold standard.

His intellectual powers were not comparable to those of Hayes, Cleveland, or Harrison, but he got on with Congress more agreeably

## McKINLEY

than anyone of the three. In fact, it is doubtful whether any President since Jefferson maintained more agreeable relations with the legislative department of the government than he. As Doctor Muzzey puts it: "The tactful, conciliatory President had preserved a remarkable accord with Congress—neither yielding to it like Grant, nor expostulating with it like Hayes, nor defying it like Cleveland." He was equally popular with the country. Probably no President since Andrew Jackson was as popular at the end of four years of service as William McKinley was at the end of his first term.

A part of the press, as usual, was hostile, vindictive and untruthful. It never failed to connect the President with "Mark" Hanna in an unpleasant way. Hanna was a successful and practical business man who brought his vulgar ideas into politics, but he did not dominate the President to the extent that editors and cartoonists would have us believe. The cartoons of the time "pictured 'Mark' Hanna as an obese man of brutalized aspect, clad in a

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suit checkered with dollar-signs, and leading the child McKinley by a string." As a matter of fact, Hanna was a past master at raising campaign funds—he was an expert "fat fryer"—but he did not lead "the child McKinley by a string."

The fact remains, however, that President McKinley did not have the attributes of a real leader. He was a follower rather than a leader. He tried to determine what the people wanted and then acted accordingly. Such a policy has its limitations. "Uncle Joe" Cannon is said to have remarked that McKinley kept his ear so close to the ground that he got it full of grasshoppers. Such a course as this obviously took "him out of the category of high statesmanship," but made him "the sort of man who does in general go farther than any but the very greatest genius."<sup>1</sup>

Cleveland and McKinley were antipodal. James Ford Rhodes makes an interesting comment in this connection. "Unquestionably," he says, "if the Cleveland and McKin-

<sup>1</sup> H. T. Peck.



© *Pach Brothers*

THEODORE ROOSEVELT  
From a photograph from life



## ROOSEVELT

ley qualities can be happily combined, as they were in Lincoln, the nearest possible approach to the ideal ruler is the result." This is undoubtedly true, but it is also begging the question since, in the natural course of events, a Lincoln is produced only in long intervals.

William McKinley, although not a great man, was an excellent President and will always be remembered in a kindly way for the purity of his character and for the unfailing sympathy, patience, and courtesy which he exhibited in his dealings with men. In his case, too, it may be said that mediocrity which forbears accomplishes more than a genius which irritates.

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Now what shall we say of the successor to President McKinley? That man would be indeed rash who would attempt at this time to pass anything like a final judgment upon the ability and services of Theodore Roosevelt; but that he was a man of unusual ability and one who rendered a valuable service to the



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country, few, I think, will deny. Some, no doubt, would like to see in the chief executive a greater degree of presidential dignity, with less of impulse and more of reason. Many regret that in the organization of "Ananias" clubs Mr. Roosevelt put so much emphasis upon Touchstone's advanced degrees of the lie. They would prefer the "retort courteous," or the "quip modest," or even the "reply churlish," to the "countercheck quarrelsome," the "lie circumstantial," or the "lie direct." In spite of all this, however, it is safe to say that Mr. Roosevelt was a man of tremendous motive power, physical as well as mental, and that he stirred up the dry bones of conventionality in a most refreshing if not a dignified way; and I should not be surprised if the historian of the future were to set Mr. Roosevelt down as the chief leader in a civic renaissance and the first apostle in what President Angell once termed "The Age of the Quickened Conscience."

Theodore Roosevelt was born in comparatively luxurious surroundings in the city of

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New York in 1858. His ancestors on his father's side were Dutch while his maternal ancestry was a mixture of Scotch, Irish and English. As a boy and a young man Roosevelt had a frail constitution, but by means of physical exercise and outdoor life he became a man of robust constitution and unusual physical power.

Soon after his graduation from Harvard University he entered political life and became interested in the reform of the civil service. His impulses were honest and he was always an exponent of the "square deal" in politics as well as in business.

He was a member of the National Civil Service Reform Commission, Police Commissioner of New York City, and, at a later time, Assistant Secretary of the Navy in President McKinley's administration. When the war with Spain came on, he resigned from the Navy Department, raised a regiment of cavalry known as the "Rough Riders" and fought with conspicuous bravery in Cuba. As the "Hero of San Juan Hill" he was elected Gov-

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ernor of New York and later Vice-President of the United States.

He became President at the age of forty-three upon the death of President McKinley in 1901. He was an active President. He kept something bobbing up all the time. He had the most important part in the settlement of the anthracite coal strike in 1902; he was instrumental in making peace between Russia and Japan in 1905; he was awarded the Nobel Prize; and he brought about the building of the Panama Canal. In addition to this, he was the motive power in the enactment of much important legislation.

President Roosevelt was a man of tireless energy and unbounded enthusiasm. He could ride farther, play harder, and tramp more miles per day in swamps and jungles than any of his companions. When John Morley visited this country he said the two most extraordinary things he saw here were Niagara Falls and Theodore Roosevelt. He also remarked that Roosevelt had many of the qualities of the great Napoleon—courage, perseverance

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and leadership—and one quality that Napoleon never possessed, a high moral purpose.

President Roosevelt's most formidable weapon was his powerful personality, but he was also effective through the medium of his writings. In the course of his busy life he found time to write more than thirty worthy volumes on history, politics, and outdoor life. His writings constitute a definite and positive achievement quite aside from his more active accomplishments.

But with all of this President Roosevelt was far from perfect. He too had the "defects of his qualities." He deplored "politics" and emphasized the "square deal" and yet he could, at times, play the political game with the best of them. His abuse of Mr. Taft and his policies in the campaign of 1912 was deplorable, and his attitude toward President Wilson during the World War is scarcely commendable. Doctor David Franklin Houston in his *Eight Years with Wilson's Cabinet* puts a dent in Roosevelt's armor in this connection. His letters also, as quoted by

## FROM LINCOLN TO COOLIDGE

Lord Grey in his *Memoirs*, add nothing to his reputation for fair dealing. And yet Mr. Roosevelt was the most refreshing and dynamic character and one of the most brilliant that ever occupied the Presidential chair, and I am inclined to think that the historian of the future, when the returns are all in, will place him in the list of the five greatest Presidents of the United States. Even Homer nods, and so did Mr. Roosevelt. With all his fine qualities he did, at times, play the game of petty politics. These instances, however, were the exceptions which proved the rule. The balance was strongly on the other side.

## TAFT

It is likewise too early to look upon President Taft's administration as a matter of history. Judged superficially, it would seem to have been a partial failure; but judged from the standpoint of actual achievement it was by no means so. Mr. Taft suffered, as Van Buren did, in comparison with his predecessor, and he was not always happy in the choice of

## TAFT

his advisers. He was also, I have no doubt, often compelled by the demands of practical politics to do things which must have been exceedingly distasteful to him. In so far as personal character and high ideals are concerned, Mr. Taft will compare favorably with any of his predecessors in the presidential office. The eight votes in the Electoral College do not represent the estimate which the American people have put upon the character and services of President Taft.

Mr. Taft has had a long and illustrious career as lawyer, judge, Governor of the Philippine Islands, Secretary of War, President, and finally, as Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court. At the same time he has shown an intelligent and effective interest in all large matters of public concern. He has taken a leading part in the advocacy of the League of Nations and the World Court, and the historian of the future will doubtless point to him as the pioneer in the movement to simplify and expedite court procedure.

During the campaign of 1912 Mr. Taft was

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represented by the Progressives as a "hopeless" standpatter. As a matter of fact he was anything but that. He was surrounded and to a certain extent influenced by the standpat element of his party but he himself was progressive enough to suit the average thinking American. A review of his official acts and the achievements of his administration demonstrate this fact clearly enough. He promoted and signed legislation relating to railroads, the Interstate Commerce Commission, Postal Savings Banks, the Parcels Post, trusts, and other important matters. He was represented as a foe to "Conservation" but wrongly so. On the subject of the tariff, however, he undoubtedly made a serious blunder. The President and his party were pledged to a revision of the tariff downward, and the Payne-Aldrich tariff bill fell far short of fulfilling the pledges. The President, notwithstanding, signed the bill and heralded it in his now famous Winona speech as the best tariff act in the history of the United States. It was this more than anything else that caused the

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“Insurgent” revolt. In general, however, it may be said that Mr. Taft’s administration was a successful one and that the President himself was an enlightened and forward-looking man. He was a happy medium between McKinley and Roosevelt. He had none of the ineptitude of the former and was easier on the nerves than the latter. The public has been rather slow to grasp these facts. There is a reason for this. Mr. Taft, let it be said to his credit, has always been weak on “publicity”; while Mr. Roosevelt was the best advertiser of his generation. He was never averse to letting his left hand know what his right hand was doing, and whenever he launched a crusade for better things he saw to it that he was “seen of men.”

Since leaving the Presidential chair, Mr. Taft has exhibited the finest and highest type of American citizenship. He became a professor of law in Yale University and, incidentally, a writer and speaker of great force and influence upon public questions. His utterances have been characterized by candor



## FROM LINCOLN TO COOLIDGE

and sanity, and have made a strong appeal to thinking people wearied by platitudes, pronounced impressively, for political effect. During the World War, as president of the League to Enforce Peace, he saw the necessity of winning the war *first* and of making peace *afterwards*. He consequently devoted himself to the tasks of war and peace, in the order named, in a patriotic and high-minded way. After the conclusion of the War he championed the cause of the League of Nations in a most enlightened and effective manner. Mr. Taft is a valuable asset to the Nation. He has answered most effectively the question, "What shall we do with our ex-Presidents?"

At the present time probably no public man in the United States stands higher in the esteem of thinking men than William Howard Taft. His kindly and genial disposition, his saving grace of humor, his sound common sense, his broad tolerance and his international vision, as well as his great judicial ability, have endeared him to the hearts of the American people.

## WILSON

### WILSON

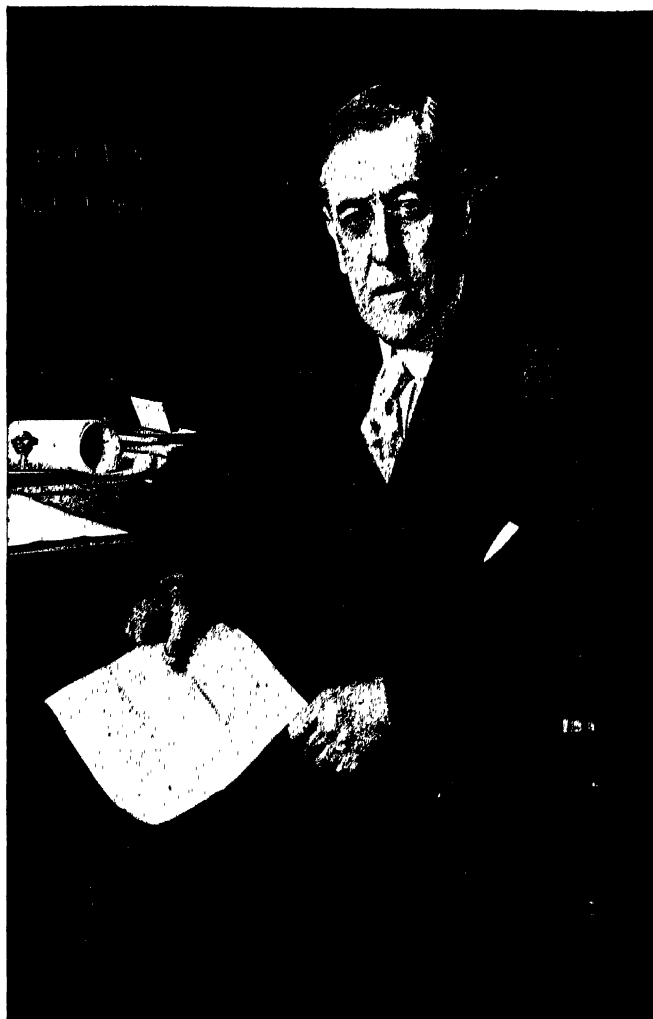
We come now to the most difficult task of all—that of putting even a tentative estimate upon the character and public services of Woodrow Wilson. President Wilson was a type of man comparatively new to American politics. The type is familiar enough in Europe but not in the United States. This scholarly type is a power in European governments and if, in the calmer future, the two administrations of President Wilson should commend themselves, in the main, to the sober judgment of the American people, the results might be far-reaching. It cannot be denied that a large part of the people are tired of the old-school politician and his “practical” methods and are ready to welcome a new order of things. Some were obviously disappointed in the new order inaugurated by President Wilson. Possibly they were expecting too much. It is, however, safe to say that President Wilson conducted the affairs of the Nation in a courageous, patriotic, and high-minded, if

## FROM LINCOLN TO COOLIDGE

not tactful, manner during one of the most trying and perplexing periods which the American Republic has ever experienced. The decision of the court of history will be awaited with interest. No one can say with any degree of confidence what this decision will be. There are, however, a few palpable facts which must of necessity have a part in making up this final verdict.

Woodrow Wilson's Scotch ancestry and Southern environment had much to do with making him what he was. He had a splendid mind and its training was superintended by his father—a man of conscience and intellect. With him—and with his father as well—a thing was either right or wrong. There was no groping about for a middle-ground of compromise. He belonged to an "aristocracy of brains" and had been subjected in his education to a severe intellectual regimen. He thus became, as Doctor David F. Houston has remarked, "an intellectual thoroughbred."

President Wilson was, without much doubt, the most intellectual man that ever occupied



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WOODROW WILSON  
From a photograph from life



## WILSON

the Presidential chair. He was certainly the best trained man in so far as formal education and scholarship are concerned. His comparative lack of experience in business matters, however, left something to be desired. His life had partaken somewhat of the cloister,—it was certainly quite largely academic—until he was elected Governor of New Jersey. This life precluded an active participation in the world of business and politics. His training for the Presidency was, therefore, somewhat one-sided. He himself was rather fond of saying that he had a “one-track mind.” He did not find it easy as an executive to turn readily from one problem to another or to drive a series of problems abreast, as a capable executive must frequently do. This lack of business contact also caused him at times to distrust unduly the motives of business men. Not being in his own familiar field he felt ill at ease. I do not mean to say that a business man would have done better than he, but simply that Woodrow Wilson with a larger business experience would have been better

## FROM LINCOLN TO COOLIDGE

equipped for his task. The "business man" in politics has been over-estimated. To my mind Doctor Houston hits the nail on the head when he says: "I have not been greatly impressed by the capacity of the average business man in his own line and I have been still less impressed by the capacity of the practical business man for the business of statesmanship. Experience in the Great War did not justify his being placed on a pedestal for his performance in governmental fields. The business man has his limitations—many of them—and one of these is to distrust those who . . . do not fully share his thoughts, and especially to distrust one who gets out of the beaten path, thinks new thoughts, and clothes them in unconventional phrases."<sup>1</sup> In Woodrow Wilson's case the dominance of the business instinct would have been a calamity; a more extensive contact with the methods and ideals of business would have been an advantage.

Mr. Wilson was a clear thinker. His mind

<sup>1</sup> *Eight Years with Wilson's Cabinet*, II, p. 172.

## WILSON

worked with all the precision and accuracy of a perfect machine. It never slipped. His skill in the use of the spoken and written word was remarkable. In this respect he was excelled by Lincoln alone among the Presidents. Wilson was an artist in literary expression; Lincoln was a genius.

President Wilson, also, to a certain extent, had "the defects of his qualities." He was an ardent progressive but he was, at the same time, a sensitive, reserved, and cultured gentleman. In the natural course of events he incited jealousies and aroused animosities which impeded the progress of his program. The controversy with Senator Henry Cabot Lodge probably changed, for a time at least, the current of our history. The President schoolmastered the situation and his enemies became petty, vindictive, and personal. The President struck back. He was never given to turning the other cheek. He felt sure that he was right and the spirit of the Covenanter told him that it would be sinful to yield. He accepted no compromise. "He played for the



## FROM LINCOLN TO COOLIDGE

verdict of history.” “I would rather lose,” he exclaimed, “in a cause that will some day win, than win in a cause that will some day lose.” He hit hard and stated his case effectively but was sometimes unfortunate in the expressions which he used. “Too proud to fight” and “Peace without victory” necessitated too much explanation. These, however, were but Homeric nods. He was a man of vision. He took a long view of things. He had a much deeper and truer insight into the meaning of human affairs than any of his adversaries. This fact was at times a detriment to his leadership. He was often too far in advance of his followers. The effective leader must keep within shouting distance of those whom he would lead.

On the whole, President Wilson managed the affairs of the Nation well in a critical period. He represented the sovereign will at home and abroad with dignity and effect. He presided over the passage of some of the most important legislation of the generation. His greatest achievement, however, in the eyes of the

## HARDING

future historian, is likely to be along the lines of world organization and world peace. Individuals have found a way of settling their controversies—a better way than the ordeal or the wager of battle. Nations will sometime do the same thing. They will find a substitute for war. They cannot claim to be really civilized until they do. If, in the natural evolution of events, the plans of Woodrow Wilson should develop an orderly and peaceful world, the historian of the future is likely to point to him as the pioneer and the potent figure in the most significant movement of modern times. Be that as it may, President Wilson is likely to go down in history with Washington, Lincoln, Cleveland, and Roosevelt as one of the five greatest Presidents of the United States.

## HARDING

The nominating conventions of the two great parties in 1920 were disappointments. Neither Mr. Cox nor Mr. Harding was a prominent leader in his own party. Neither

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had been particularly conspicuous in the preliminary campaign. Both were compromise candidates and neither represented the best leadership of his party. Neither nomination evoked any particular enthusiasm. The weary delegate who said sadly, "Let's nominate Harding and go home," apparently sounded the keynote of the retreat.

After the nominations had been made, Dr. David F. Houston, a member of the Wilson Cabinets, wrote as follows:

"What a drop there will be to either Cox or Harding. If Mr. Harding is elected, the contrast will be painful. It will be somewhat tragic to have a man of Mr. Wilson's intellect and high standards succeeded by a man of Mr. Harding's mediocre mind and ordinary standards of thinking and action. At this time, particularly, the nation needs a leader, and Mr. Harding will not be a leader. He cannot be. He has never stood for any great cause. He knows very little, has no vision, very little sense of direction, and independence. He was not nominated to lead. He was selected

## HARDING

because he was colorless and pliable. If he is elected, he will be the tool of such tried leaders as Lodge, Penrose, and others. He will play the game of the Senate. The Senate will be supreme. The old policies will be revived. Protection will raise its head again and raise it higher than ever. The revolt of the people against the Payne-Aldrich Tariff Bill will be forgotten. This element of the Republican party which will be in the ascendant knows exactly where it is going. It will go back to where it was before 1915. What a trial it will be to have to witness Mr. Harding's efforts to think and his efforts to say what he thinks." <sup>1</sup>

There is a great deal of truth in this paragraph but not the whole truth. Personally Mr. Harding was a genial, courteous and affable man. He took his new duties seriously and his intentions were the best. His political associations, however, over a long term of years were unfortunate. Like Arthur, his boon companions in politics were not of the *élite*.

<sup>1</sup> *Eight Years with Wilson's Cabinet*, Vol. II, p. 93.

## FROM LINCOLN TO COOLIDGE

But unlike Arthur, he did not succeed in rising to the occasion when he became President. He apparently tried hard and he meant well; but "he meant well feebly." He was not able to dominate the situation and regrettable consequences followed.

In some respects the amiable Harding was a relief after the tense, rigid and opinionated Wilson. He was elected by a tremendous popular majority which was not necessarily an evidence of his own popularity but, to some extent, at least, a protest against the Wilsonian *régime*. The League of Nations also cut some figure in a campaign in which misrepresentation and an appeal to prejudice played a significant part.

The new President, having in mind perhaps the criticism urged against the methods of his predecessor, announced that in all important matters he would avail himself of the advice of the "best minds" in his party. He invited the Vice-President to sit with his advisers and he appointed a Cabinet which contained three of the outstanding men of the

## COOLIDGE

entire country—Charles E. Hughes, Andrew Mellon and Herbert Hoover. He got on agreeably with the *personnel* of the government largely because he assumed no definite or positive leadership. He sought to harmonize persons and factions and aspired to be “the prophet of a better understanding.” He made some headway in this direction, but in the meantime things were being done by members of his administration concerning which he had no knowledge. Like Grant, he was wounded in the house of his friends. The scandals incident to this period are now dragging their weary length through the courts. The final verdict of history upon the Harding *régime* lies in the distant future. The chances are, however, that the historian of the period will look upon it as an unfortunate episode in American history.

## COOLIDGE

The accession of Calvin Coolidge was the coming of a new and better day. His antecedents and background were entirely different.

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He had had political experience but it was of a very different character. He was unfettered. He was under obligations to no one for his high office. He was a free agent and he proceeded accordingly. He was himself and was self-reliant. He thus became an enigma to the politicians and a delight to the people.

Much has been said of the President's so-called mediocre intellectuality. Less is being said as time goes on. There may be a substantial review of the tentative estimate when the returns are all in. One thing seems certain. Whether the President is a brilliant or mediocre man, he is giving the country a dignified and business-like administration of its affairs. His words are few and his actions sensible. He is doing the day's work with the genius of common sense; and as for economy, he can "get more mileage out of a dollar" than the oldest inhabitant of Aberdeen.

“WHY GREAT MEN ARE NOT  
CHOSEN PRESIDENTS”





## CHAPTER IV

### “WHY GREAT MEN ARE NOT CHOSEN PRESIDENTS”

ONE of the chapters of Lord Bryce's famous work, *The American Commonwealth*, is entitled, “Why Great Men are not chosen Presidents.” Near the close of the chapter he gives this interesting summary: “We may now answer the question from which we started. Great men are not chosen Presidents, firstly, because great men are rare in politics; secondly, because the method of choice does not bring them to the top; thirdly, because they are not, in quiet times, absolutely needed.”

Such a statement as this should furnish food for reflection. If our review of the Presidents has been at all accurate it must be evident that great men are sometimes chosen Presidents, but not invariably so. It is also true that, for one reason or another, we have

## “WHY GREAT MEN

not been able to utilize in the presidential office the superior abilities of many of our outstanding public men. We have in too many cases preferred the mediocre man to the man of brilliant parts. There are obvious reasons for this state of things. Lord Bryce thinks that “the proportion of first-rate ability drawn into politics is smaller in America than in most European countries.” It is undoubtedly true that business and the professions, rather than politics, have attracted the best talent of the Nation and will continue to do so until a public career is made more attractive to the right sort of men by being made more continuous and dignified.

It is also true, as Lord Bryce has remarked, that great men “are not, in quiet times, absolutely needed.” “The ordinary American voter,” he says, “does not object to mediocrity. He has a lower conception of the qualities requisite to make a statesman than those who direct public opinion in Europe have. He likes his candidate to be sensible, vigorous, and, above all, what he calls ‘magnetic,’

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and does not value, because he sees no need for, originality or profundity, a fine culture or a wide knowledge."

In this view the voter is more than half right. After all, firmness, common sense, and honesty are the essential attributes of a good chief executive. Brilliancy of intellect is not necessary in the daily routine of the presidential office. It is quite probable that some of our statesmen of superior ability, such as Henry Clay and Charles Sumner, would have been only moderately successful as chief executives. It is entirely possible also that men of less ability but of different temperament might have given the country a more satisfactory administration of public affairs. All of this is applicable, of course, to "quiet times" and not to periods of storm and stress. In time of national peril a pilot with a longer and a keener vision is imperative. The responsibilities are colossal and the consequences of error are appalling. This is no work for the commonplace skipper. It was little less than providential that Abraham Lincoln and Wood-

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row Wilson, rather than obtuser minds, had charge of the destiny of the Republic at the two most critical moments in its existence. It should be borne in mind also that a national crisis *may* appear at any time and on very short notice. In such a case, mediocrity and provincialism would not suffice. “Main Street” would be confused and baffled. In the future, rather more than in the past, the President of the United States should know what men are thinking on the great highways and in the great capitals of the world. He should know the traditions, ideals, and aspirations of people everywhere. American diplomacy, from the very nature of our self-contained career, has too often been found wanting when measured against the diplomacy of the old world. The Presidency of the future should find no place for the “available” candidate with negative qualifications.

Admitting for the time being that the best talent of the nation is not finding its way into politics and will not do so as long as present conditions in political life obtain, it is perti-

## ARE NOT CHOSEN PRESIDENTS”

ment to ask whether or not we have utilized to the best advantage all of the talent which has offered itself to the public service. The general impression is that we have not done so. The logical inference from Lord Bryce's discussion is also to this effect. I am inclined to think, however, that we have not been as remiss in this respect as we might appear to have been from a superficial survey of the situation. Let us run over the list of some of our most conspicuous public men who have been, or should have been, considered in connection with the presidential office, but who were passed by. In this way our sins of omission may be made to stand out in a more definite and concrete way.

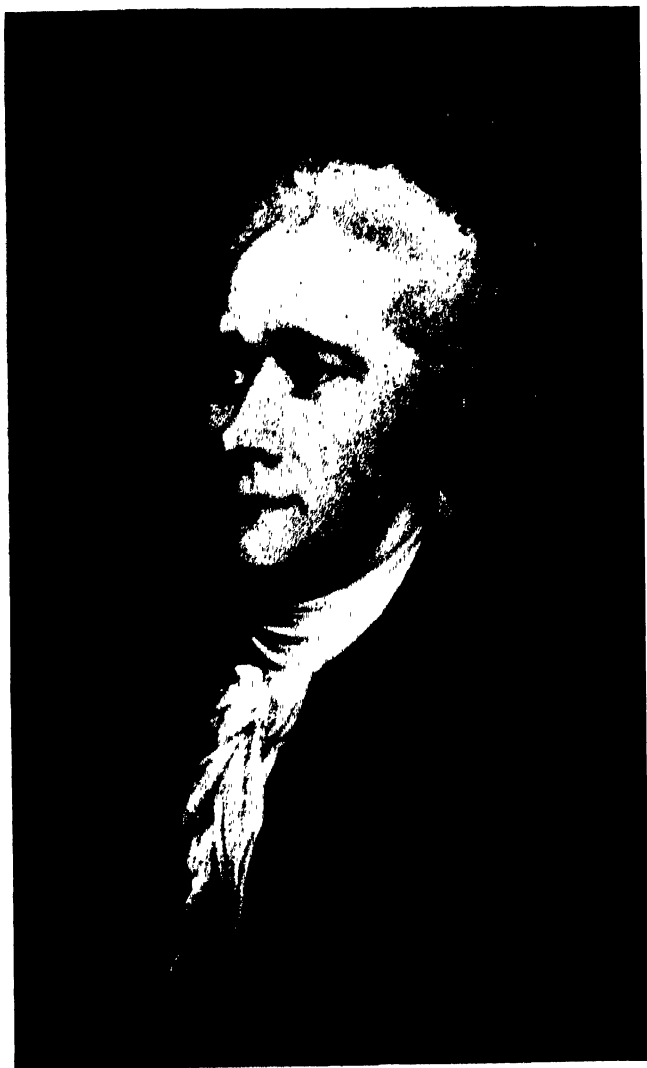
### BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

At the time of Washington's first election to the Presidency it was stated that "for a time the pretensions of Franklin were discussed in private circles," but it is certain that Franklin was never seriously considered in connection with the Presidency either by the people

## “WHY GREAT MEN

of the time or by himself. The word “pretensions” as used in this connection is rather unfortunate since Franklin never aspired to the office and probably did not know at the time that he was being “discussed in private circles.” It was not Franklin’s custom to put himself forward as a candidate for any office. He was accustomed to say that his ideal citizen was the man who neither sought nor avoided public office.

Franklin was the most illustrious as well as the most versatile American of his day. He could do more things well than any of his contemporaries. He could not, however, do all things equally well. Franklin was a genius but he had no particular genius for executive duty. A genius is not likely to be methodical. Franklin was not. John Adams thought him indolent because he was unsystematic. The detail of a great executive office would not have inspired him. At any rate, his advanced age precluded the possibility of the Presidency. He died in 1790 at the age of eighty-four.



ALEXANDER HAMILTON





## ARE NOT CHOSEN PRESIDENTS"

### ALEXANDER HAMILTON

Alexander Hamilton, possibly the most brilliant man in the history of the public life of the United States, would have made an excellent President. Like William Pitt, Viscount Grey, and Elihu Root, he had brains enough to do anything to which he might wish to turn his hand. His career was cut short, however, by the bullet of Aaron Burr at the early age of forty-seven.

### DANIEL WEBSTER

Daniel Webster was an impressive personality and a lawyer of great power. He was "the god-like Daniel" and every word he spoke "weighed a pound." He was a brilliant Secretary of State and one of the greatest leaders of the United States Senate. He would have made a far better President than any of the mediocrities or "dark horses" of his day. He was not "available" however, and that for several reasons. Andrew Jackson prophesied that Webster would never be President be-

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cause he was too far east, knew too much, and was too honest. The people also thought apparently that he was too anxious for the presidential office. His unfortunate “Seventh of March Speech” seemed to indicate that he was willing to sacrifice the principles of a life-time in order to attain the Presidency. It is true that men like Webster, Clay, Cass, Douglas, Seward, Sherman, Blaine and Bryan who sought the office most eagerly and persistently were not destined to have their wishes gratified.

### HENRY CLAY

Henry Clay was a fascinating man of wide experience and good intellectual power. He was a real leader and a man of unusual influence. He is looked upon as one of the great Speakers of the House of Representatives and was a perennial candidate for the Presidency. He was, however, too much given to compromise to make a successful executive officer. A successful President must have a firm hand and must be able, on occasion, to hew to the line.

## ARE NOT CHOSEN PRESIDENTS"

He may compromise on non-essentials but he should take a stand on fundamentals. Clay found this exceedingly difficult to do. As a result his position was often in doubt. The people didn't know, for example, whether he favored or opposed the annexation of Texas. An appearance of insincerity or vacillation is fatal to the prospects of a public man.

### JOHN C. CALHOUN

John C. Calhoun was a man of powerful mentality. He was well versed in constitutional law and history. The trend of events however, put him outside the pale. His extreme States' Rights views and his advocacy of nullification and secession disqualified him for leadership at a time when the nationalistic spirit was waxing strong. The people were gravitating definitely toward the gospel of Webster, and Calhoun soon found himself an advocate of a "lost cause." The leadership of Calhoun, in all the circumstances, would have been destructive.

## “WHY GREAT MEN

### STEPHEN A. DOUGLAS

Stephen A. Douglas was a natural leader of men and a fine campaigner. The “Little Giant” was a most formidable adversary either within or without the halls of Congress. He was for a time the leading public man in the United States. After Clay, Webster, and Calhoun had passed off the scene and before Lincoln, Seward and Chase came into great prominence, Douglas was the outstanding man in public life. He exhibited all the qualifications which go to make up a successful executive and then began to show some signs of weakness. He was trying to compromise the slavery question while Lincoln was saying that a house divided against itself could not stand. He was crying peace, peace, where there was no peace. He was attempting the impossible, and people began to think that he was carrying water on both shoulders. Lincoln and Breckinridge stood for definite things in 1860, while Douglas stood for “squatter sovereignty.” It would have been a calamity

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had Douglas displaced Lincoln in 1860, but he had also been a candidate for the Democratic nomination in 1852 and again in 1856. The chances are that he would have made a much better President than either Pierce or Buchanan. He was not considered "available," however. The people, or rather the politicians, preferred more submissive and colorless men in those days.

### WILLIAM H. SEWARD

William H. Seward had an illustrious career as lawyer, Governor of New York, United States Senator, and Secretary of State in Lincoln's Cabinet. He was the leading candidate for the Republican nomination in 1860 and suffered the fate which came to many other "leading candidates." He was eight years older than Lincoln, the son of a leading family in the State of New York, and a graduate of Union College. He was a good lawyer and a much more prominent man than Lincoln in 1860, and his friends confidently expected that he would receive the nomination.

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When he did not do so he accepted the portfolio of State and did much toward making Lincoln's administration a success. His masterful handling of the delicate “*Trent* Affair” will not soon be forgotten.

There is every reason to think that Mr. Seward would have made an excellent President and yet there can be no regret that he did not defeat Abraham Lincoln in the convention of 1860. It would, however, have been a stroke of great good fortune had he been nominated instead of Frémont in 1856 and in turn had defeated the listless Buchanan.

## SALMON P. CHASE

Salmon P. Chase of Ohio was one of the great Americans of his day; and, because of his eminent services, deserved well of his fellow countrymen. As an anti-slavery worker, Governor, Senator, Secretary of the Treasury, father of the National Banking System, and Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, Salmon P. Chase had a long, notable

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and effective career. James A. Garfield thought him "the leading American statesman," but Garfield was mistaken. He was a great man but not the greatest. He was impressive in personal appearance and Jovelike in his serenity, but he never caught the imagination of the period. Like Charles Sumner he took himself too seriously. He was an able and effective Secretary of the Treasury, but he never seemed adequately to realize the fact that Lincoln was at the head of the administration. He never realized that there was "one glory of the sun and another glory of the moon." He never doubted his own omniscience. He never saw himself in his true perspective. He probably would have made a good President but a poor candidate.

### CHARLES SUMNER

Charles Sumner and Thaddeus Stevens were the two great congressional leaders of the Reconstruction period. These two men determined the policy of the Nation in regard to the restoration of the Union. Sumner suc-



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ceeded Webster as Senator from Massachusetts and was a worthy successor to “the god-like Daniel.”

Sumner’s personal appearance was impressive. He was much above the usual height and a massive, finely-formed head, crowned with abundant nut-brown hair, towered above his broad and square shoulders.

His family was of English origin, ancient, cultured and well-to-do. From his New England background and environment he developed a seriousness of purpose and an inflexibility of character.

His education, both in Letters and in Law, was the best obtainable in the United States in his time. In addition to his scholastic training, his mind was broadened by extensive travel on the continent of Europe and in the British Isles. He enjoyed the acquaintance and friendship of many notable men on both sides of the Atlantic.

As a lawyer he excelled as a student and lecturer rather than as a practitioner. He was temperamentally unfitted for practice at the

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bar. A career as a trial lawyer would have been distasteful. Even as a student of law one sometimes suspects his depth and judgment. He did not have a judicial mind and in some instances not even a legal mind. Some of his constitutional interpretations were apparently dictated more by emotion than by reason. This was especially true in the case of the impeachment of Andrew Johnson.

As an orator he excelled, but again he had his limitations. He was a tireless student and was meticulous in his use of the English language. As a result, his diction was stilted and his efforts smelled of the lamp. He was wanting in adaptability to his audience. He lacked the human touch of Clay and Henry and the convincing quality of Hamilton and Webster. He resembled but did not equal Edmund Burke. He was the heavy artillery without much skill in maneuver. He was the full organ echoing and resounding through the spacious cathedral, but he lacked the *vox humana*. He had no sense of humor and often failed utterly to get the other fellow's view-

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point. He stuck pins into people and wondered why they squirmed. He castigated his opponents in debate in a brutal and personal way and was surprised when they showed resentment. He insisted that what he said was true but he forgot that “it is the truth that hurts.”

Sumner was opinionated and never doubted his own infallibility. He could not work harmoniously with other men. He locked horns with President Grant in regard to the annexation of San Domingo. For a considerable time there was a running fight between these two men, in which neither was capable of understanding the purposes and methods of the other. Sumner belittled Grant on every occasion, and Grant in turn waxed sarcastic in regard to Sumner. On one occasion some one volunteered the remark to General Grant that Mr. Sumner did not believe in the Bible, to which Grant curtly replied: “No, I suppose not. He didn’t write it.”

He was a statesman rather than a politician. He had none of the arts, tricks, or devious

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devices of practical politics. He had the courage of his convictions and was simply, naturally, and transparently honest. "His gaze was fixed on a distant goal, and he did not stoop to look at what lay in the path." Neither did he possess any of the arts of diplomacy as practiced in his day. Bismarck once said, "If you wish to deceive your opponent in a diplomatic exchange, tell him the truth." Sumner might easily have been guilty of this type of deception.

Sumner was interested in peace, finance, foreign affairs, the tariff, and other problems which came before the Senate in his day. He displayed real ability in his handling of these subjects. But it was to the problems of slavery and reconstruction that he gave his best and mightiest efforts. He looked upon the institution of slavery with loathing and he hissed his contempt of the slaveholder through clenched teeth. In the matter of Reconstruction he wished the South to see that "the way of the transgressor is hard."

Sumner was a radical and never reckoned

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the consequences of his words or actions when convinced that he was right. Great causes are advanced by personal sacrifices such as Sumner was always prepared to make. He realized that “battles between right and wrong have never been fought with rose water.”

Sumner was no compromiser. He deemed compromise out of the question when a moral matter was involved. Lincoln consulted him “as the barometer of the nation’s conscience.” He was not wedded to consistency. He looked upon it as the “bane of small minds.” He was a radical, an idealist and a prophet. There is great need for more of this type of man in the Senate and House today. The timidity of the average public man is appalling. Cowards often masquerade as conservatives.

Naturally, Sumner was not always right. He led the nation astray on Negro suffrage. He did a grievous wrong to the South—and to the North, too, for that matter—in his “thorough” policy of Reconstruction. Here was his Achilles’ heel. At this point the sharp arrow of criticism enters. We should bear in

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mind, however, when contrasting the two sides of the shield, that the defects and errors of Sumner's career serve only to magnify, by comparison, his true moral grandeur. In the years following the Civil War he had attained "a position of power and influence second only to that of Grant."

And what he *was* was vastly more important than what he *did*. Theodore Parker called him "a Senator with a conscience" and Emerson said "he was the whitest soul that I ever knew." Be that as it may, Charles Sumner is entitled, now that the returns are all in, to a high place among the makers of the American Nation.

Sumner was mentioned at times by his friends and admirers in connection with the Presidency of the United States. It is now evident, however, that, in spite of his brilliancy of intellect, he would not have made a successful chief executive. A less brilliant but better balanced man of mediocre attainments would probably have made a more satisfactory President.

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### THADDEUS STEVENS

The names of Thaddeus Stevens and Charles Sumner are usually spoken in the same breath because they saw eye to eye in matters relating to slavery and reconstruction, and fought together their great congressional battles involving these problems. And yet it would be difficult to find two public men more unlike, in general, than these two leaders of the House and Senate.

In appearance Stevens was impressive but not massive. He was frail as a boy and never robust as a man. He was slightly lame and usually walked with the aid of a cane. He was tall and slender and, like Theodore Roosevelt, developed a considerable degree of physical power by means of judicious exercise. He had a distinguished air and while speaking seemed surrounded by an atmosphere of intellectuality. Contemporaries commented upon “the wonderful beauty of those chiseled features which never lost their eagle look even to his dying day.”

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Unlike Sumner, Stevens was of the common people and came up to high estate through the hard and grinding lines of poverty. This fact helped to determine his sympathies. His New England education was another dominant factor in his make-up. Dartmouth College, in her "cloisters of the hill-girt plain," furnished his equipment and shaped his ideals as it did in the case of Daniel Webster. Stevens' success as a parliamentary leader would not have been possible without his splendid command of the English language and his outstanding ability as a public speaker.

Stevens was a better lawyer than Sumner. In fact, he was one of the best lawyers of his day.

In politics also he was much more skillful than Sumner. If this were not so, his unquestioned leadership of the House would have been impossible. In fact, he had a distinct flair for politics.

Stevens played a useful rôle in the promotion of legislation along several different lines, but it was into the anti-slavery crusade and



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the problem of Reconstruction that he threw himself with the whole intensity of heart and soul. Here he worked hand in hand with Charles Sumner. His weapons were the same but he wielded them with a different technique. His diction was clear, crisp, nimble and effective. He had no “frippery of labored rhetoric.” His manner of speaking was direct and his language not stilted. He had a marked sense of humor which was usually genial and kindly but could at times be caustic. In his arraignment of slavery and the Southern leaders he was often sharp and sarcastic where Sumner was bluntly and brutally personal. He reminds one in some respects of the late Speaker Thomas B. Reed and he was as dangerous an opponent in debate as Senator James A. Reed of Missouri.

Like Sumner, Stevens was in error in his attitude on Negro suffrage and if we had to do it all over again we would not adopt his rigid and vindictive theory of Reconstruction.

He seems also to have lost his balance for the moment in the impeachment of Andrew

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Johnson. Johnson was not a capable President and he was a crude and irritating personality; but he certainly was not guilty on the counts charged in the indictment. On the day of his inauguration as Vice-President, Johnson was "half-seas over." When he took the oath of office as President he said nothing of Lincoln and very little about the country, but a great deal about his own achievements and virtues. As a commentary he added gravely: "The duties have been mine, the consequences God's." In saying this he seems to have taken the Deity into the firm—but only as a junior partner. James Ford Rhodes remarks in his essay on *The Presidential Office*, "Johnson degraded the office, and he is the only one of our Presidents of whom this can be said."

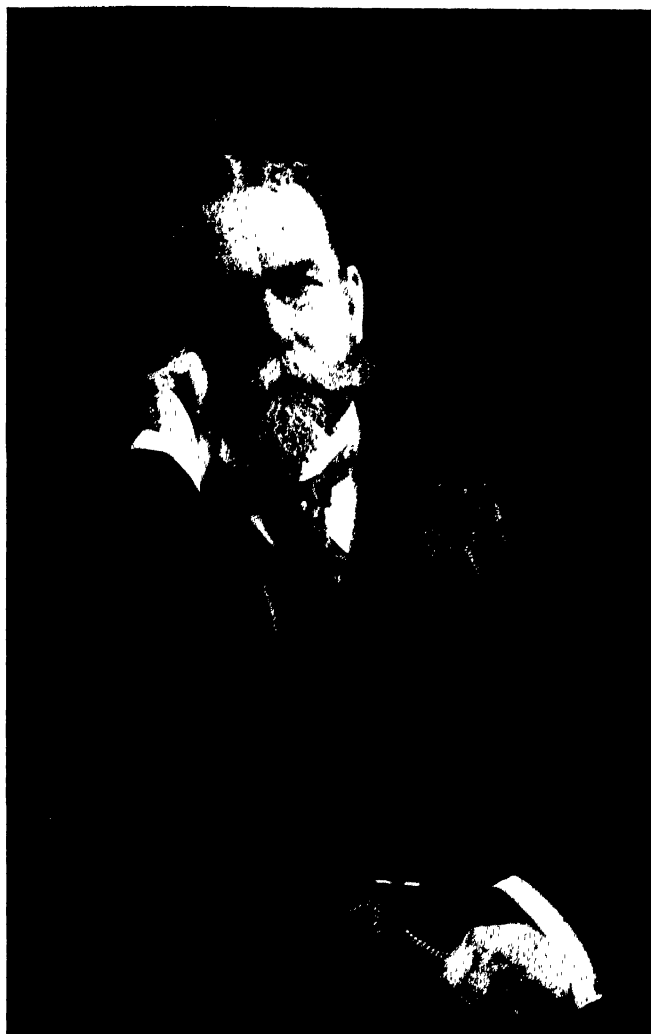
And yet, when all this is said, it should be borne in mind that Johnson was not on trial for egotism, intoxication, or bad taste. But feeling was aroused and Stevens and Sumner, throwing judicial calm to the winds, would probably have held him guilty of all the

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offenses enumerated in the Decalogue, and some others in addition.

Thaddeus Stevens was not as great a man as Charles Sumner and yet he possessed many of the elements of true greatness. All things are relative. He was very generously endowed intellectually and he showed his moral fiber by standing for those things which seemed to him to be right. And over and above all, in the course of his long life, he stood steadfastly for the equality of man before the law and before his Creator. With him there was “no black or white, no bond or free, no Greek or barbarian, no Jew or Gentile.” When contemplating mere externals and non-essentials he would have said with Robert Burns, “A man’s a man for a’ that.” He indicated as much when he wrote the epitaph which appears on his modest shaft at Lancaster.

A short time after Stevens’ death, Charles Sumner delivered a eulogy upon the life and character of his fellow combatant, in the course of which he said: “I see him now, as I have so often seen him during life. His vener-



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JOHN HAY

From a photograph from life



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able form moves slowly and with uncertain steps; but the gathered strength of years is in his countenance and the light of victory on his path. Politician, calculator, time-server, stand aside! A hero statesman passes to his reward."

True democracy radiates from the souls of men like Thaddeus Stevens; and yet, although he was a much abler man than Andrew Johnson, it would have been a misfortune in many respects if he had been President of the United States in Reconstruction days.

## GEORGE F. EDMUNDS

Senator George F. Edmunds of Vermont was a candidate for the Republican nomination for the Presidency in the famous convention of 1880 which nominated James A. Garfield. Mr. Edmunds was as reliable and substantial as the granite hills of his old New England home. He was a profound lawyer and a man of sterling character and impressive dignity. He was supported for the Presidency



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publican past and a pioneer in every measure of its future reform." He was the principal author of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act of 1890 and the motive power behind many other measures which have never been connected with his name. In all probability he would have made a splendid chief executive—with the politicians wringing their hands outside the bulwarks.

### JOHN HAY

John Hay was one of the choicest spirits ever developed by our American life. As Ambassador to Great Britain and Secretary of State he proved his worth. He came to the rescue of China with his "Open Door" policy when that country lay "like a stranded whale" upon the beach, and the Hay-Pauncefote treaty made the Panama Canal possible in its present form. John Hay was a man of broad culture and fine humanitarian instincts. He did his thinking on a high plane. "As a man thinketh so is he." As President he would have brought an atmosphere to the









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constantly in mind what is best for both parties to the controversy."

The services of this master mind have not been available in the Presidency because Mr. Root is a corporation lawyer. He is also a constitutional lawyer and an international lawyer of the first magnitude, but is disqualified because he represents in court the interests of great corporations. In this respect the corporations are wiser than the people. They procure the best talent available and it is for this reason that corporations are better managed than the Government of the United States. The people, or rather the politicians, would prefer, apparently, to select their candidates from the ranks of those lawyers who have limited their practice to Police and Justice Courts. There has never been the slightest intimation that Mr. Root has ever used his great power in an improper way, but whenever his name has been mentioned in connection with the Presidency the grim specter of "availability" stalks abroad in the land to terrify the unthinking.

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The election of a President—and a Vice-President—is the most important duty which the American people are called upon to perform and, while they have met their responsibility in a haphazard sort of way, the results on the whole are not disquieting. In fact, all things considered, they are surprisingly good. The twenty-nine American Presidents will compare very favorably with the Prime Ministers of England since 1789 or with the constitutional executives of any other European country for a corresponding length of time. It should be borne in mind also that conditions have changed in regard to the American Presidency since Lord Bryce wrote his *American Commonwealth*. Since that time at least three, and possibly four, great men have held the presidential office. We have done well. We might have done better.

**THE ETHICS OF THE  
PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN**



## CHAPTER V

### THE ETHICS OF THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

LORD BRYCE also refers to "the method of choice." This is the part of his comment to which I wish to give a more extended consideration in this chapter. It seems to me that the best talent of the Nation will not be attracted to the presidential office while the methods of the political campaign remain as they now are. A glance at the ethics of the presidential campaign in the United States is necessary to an adequate comprehension of this phase of the subject.

The student of current politics might easily become pessimistic and cynical as he considers the methods which are employed in the average American political campaign. No stone, apparently, is left unturned, and the end justifies the means. The speeches are bombastic and sensational; personalities are freely



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indulged in; principles are often lost sight of; and the cry of fraud is raised after every election. Money is freely used; some of it legitimately, more of it corruptly, and the partisan press is vindictive, mendacious, and unprincipled. Political morals seem to be at a low ebb, and if the observer did not employ the comparative method he would undoubtedly be justified in drawing some very serious conclusions. The comparative method, however, has its comforts. It is only by comparing the present with the past that progress can be noted; and when we do this we see that the present deplorable campaign methods were preceded by others of a still more deplorable character. In other words, while the methods of recent political campaigns are far from ideal, they are, for the most part, a vast improvement upon those of almost any other epoch in our history.

We reverence the Fathers of the Republic; we defer to their opinions and ascribe to them an almost superhuman wisdom; we look upon their utterances as little less than inspired,

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and yet we find that they fared badly in the political discussions of their time. Neither their great service nor their high character sufficed to shield them from infamous calumnies. They exemplified Shakespeare's famous statement, "Be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny."

We are accustomed now to look upon the members of the Constitutional Convention of 1787 as high-minded men of spotless integrity; and so they were, almost without exception. Yet many of these men, in fact, some of the ablest and best of them, were relentlessly vilified. James Wilson, a man of lofty motives and exceptional force of character and one of the greatest of the constructive statesmen of the Convention, was referred to repeatedly by the papers of the time as "Jimmy," "James, the Caledonian," and the "lieutenant-general of the myrmidons of power." Robert Morris was "Bobby, the Cofferer," who wanted a new form of government because he was hopelessly in debt to the old; Gouverneur Morris was "Gouvero, the cunning man," and Thomas

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Mifflin was "Tommy," the quartermaster-general, who supported the new Constitution because he was \$400,000 short in his accounts. Even Benjamin Franklin did not escape the vile attacks, and he was virtually called a dotard because of his advanced years. Indeed, no man escaped, however patriotic his conduct or disinterested his motives.

Anyone who imagines that Washington was universally met with garlands of flowers and pæans of praise, as at the Trenton bridge in 1789, will be rudely shocked by a perusal of the newspapers of the period. After serving his country, without money and without price, in the French and Indian War and the Revolution, as president of the Constitutional Convention and as President of the United States for two terms, he retired on the fourth of March, 1797, to his home at Mount Vernon. He had delivered his *Farewell Address*, which fell like a benediction upon the American people. It would seem that "peace on earth and good will to men" might well be the chosen motto of the time, yet the Republican

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press was most vindictive in some instances. On the sixth of March, two days after his retirement, the *Aurora* published the following comment: “‘Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace,’ was the pious ejaculation of a pious man who beheld a flood of happiness rushing in upon mankind. If ever there was a time that would license the reiteration of the ejaculation, that time has now arrived, for the man who is the source of all the misfortunes of our country is this day reduced to a level with his fellow citizens, and is no longer possessed of power to multiply evils upon the United States. If ever there was a period for rejoicing, this is the moment. Every heart, in unison with the freedom and happiness of the people, ought to beat high with exultation that the name of Washington ceases from this day to give currency to political insults, and to legalize corruption. A new era is now opening upon us, an era which promises much to the people, for public measures must now stand upon their merits, and nefarious projects can no longer

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be supported by a name. When a retrospect has been taken of the Washington administration for eight years, it is a subject of the greatest astonishment that a single individual should have cankered the principles of republicanism in an enlightened people just emerged from the gulf of despotism, and should have carried his designs against the public liberty so far as to have put in jeopardy its very existence. Such, however, are the facts, and with these staring us in the face, this day ought to be a jubilee in the United States." Such was the parting shot which the *Aurora* fired at the "Father of his Country"! It may not always be true that republics are ungrateful, but it is certainly true that the partisan press in a republic is without either gratitude or generosity.

We usually place Lincoln next to Washington in our national thinking. But he did not escape the despicable campaign methods of his time. He was abused in a coarse, brutal, and personal way. He was deserted by many in his hour of need who should have been his

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friends. Thaddeus Stevens, leader of the House of Representatives, declared in 1864 that Arnold of Illinois was the only political friend that the President had in the lower house at that time. In the course of the same year the Frémont Club expressed its disgust at the "imbecile and vacillating" policy of President Lincoln. Wendell Phillips denominated Lincoln's administration "a civil and military failure." During the campaign of 1860 Phillips had been still more abusive. Referring to the obscurity of Lincoln at the time he asked with some indignation: "Who is this huckster in politics?" "Who is this county court advocate?" Phillips also published an article entitled "Abraham Lincoln, the Slave Hound of Illinois," the first sentence of which ran as follows: "We gibbet a Northern Hound to-day, side by side with the infamous Mason of Virginia." Lincoln's personal appearance was ridiculed in the papers of the day. He was stupid, vulgar, and repulsive. He was the ape, the gorilla, and by some it was said that African blood flowed in

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his veins. He was a coarse, uncouth clod-head, his grammar was perverted, and his rhetoric outrageous; notwithstanding the fact that we now look upon his addresses and State papers as models of terse and forceful English.

In 1866 Mr. Edward A. Pollard, editor of the Richmond *Examiner*, said that "the new President (had) brought with him the buffoonery and habits of a demagogue of the backwoods." "We have already stated," he said, "that Mr. Lincoln was not elected President of the United States for any commanding fame, or for any known merit as a statesman. His panegyrists, although they could not assert for him a guiding intellect or profound scholarship, claimed for him some homely and substantial virtues. It was said that he was transparently honest. But his honesty was rather that facile disposition that readily took impressions from whatever was urged upon it. It was said that he was excessively amiable. But his amiability was animal. It is small merit to have a Falstaffian humor in one's

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blood. Abraham Lincoln was neither kind nor cruel, in the proper sense of these words, because he was destitute of the higher order of sensibilities.

“His appearance corresponded to his rough and uncultivated mind. His figure was tall and gaunt looking; his shoulders were inclined forward; his arms of unusual length; and his gait astride, rapid, and shuffling. The savage wits in the Southern newspapers had no other name for him than the ‘Illinois Ape.’”

It is needless, however, to multiply instances of this character. We are inclined, and with good reason, I think, to look upon Washington, Lincoln, Jefferson, Hamilton, John Adams, and John Quincy Adams as six of the greatest and best men in the history of the public life of the United States; and yet if we were to trust the testimony of the contemporary partisan press and of opposition campaign orators we would be forced to regard them as the most consummate villains of their time.

In making an optimistic comparison be-



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tween the campaign methods of this and other days I do not mean to say that statements equally extreme and vituperative are not now sometimes made in the heat of a political campaign; but I am confident that they are neither so frequent nor so typical as they once were. Neither are they so effective in political contests. The people of to-day must be reached more largely through the intellect than through the emotions. They are not so easily deceived. They have outlived, to a certain extent, their gregarious impulses and are not so easily herded or stampeded as they were a few generations ago. In fact, abuse, personalities, and bombast are likely to have a boomerang effect. When a prominent candidate for political office in 1904 said some things, on the eve of a presidential election, about his opponent's sympathy for corporations and the use of corporate funds in the campaign, and was not able to prove his assertions, he must have been painfully aware of the fact that he had made a tactical blunder, to say the least. As soon as the fact is fully appreciated by our

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political leaders that these methods are really not effective, they will be wholly discarded.

Another improvement in the ethics of the campaign may be noted in the attitude which public men assume toward their political opponents. There has been, I am sure, in recent years, more of dignity and courtesy on the part of public men in their dealings with political rivals. "The blunt and irascible old John Adams," as his biographer in the *American Statesmen Series* calls him, was a really great man in many respects, and Thomas Jefferson was a greater man, but the petty jealousies, bickerings, and animosities which existed between the two men redound to the glory of neither. Alexander Hamilton, next to Washington, was the most useful man of the constitutional period, and the most brilliant American of his time without any exception; yet he and Jefferson, as the latter expressed it, faced each other "like two fighting cocks in a pit." Neither was entirely candid, much less magnanimous. They must divide the dishonor.

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Hamilton and John Adams were the two leading men in the Federalist party in 1800. Adams was the choice of his party for a second presidential term, and Hamilton, of course, was expected to support him. This he did outwardly, but under cover his attitude was treacherously hostile. He wrote a letter to be distributed, as he said, "in a judicious manner," on the "Public Conduct and Character of John Adams, Esq., President of the United States." In the course of this letter of fifty printed pages he attempted to show that Adams was entirely unfitted for the office which he held. He did not possess the talents necessary for the administration of the government. He had defects of personal character which unfitted him for the Presidency. He was an eccentric, vain, and jealous man, much given to foibles and crotchets; his French policy was pernicious; he had an ungovernable temper and gave way to paroxysms of anger, and had apparently none of those qualifications which a President of the United States should possess; yet, said Hamilton in

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conclusion, *I am advising my friends to vote for him nevertheless.* The letter was intended for secret distribution, but a copy of it fell into the hands of Aaron Burr and was spread far and wide. The disclosure of this treachery apparently did not perceptibly lessen the prestige of Hamilton, yet I am confident that a similar piece of intrigue in our own day would relegate its author to political oblivion.

Political contentions were probably never more bitter in the United States than during the Presidency of John Adams. "Men who had been intimate all their lives," wrote Jefferson, "cross the street to avoid meeting and turn their heads another way lest they should be obliged to touch their hats." Now men may fulminate in the halls of Congress but they hobnob in the cloak-rooms.

The "era of good feeling," too, is very largely a misnomer. It is commonly said that during the interval between the downfall of the Federalist party in the administration of Jefferson and the organization of the Whig party in the time of Jackson, the utmost of

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good feeling prevailed. It is true, of course, that party lines had vanished for the time being and party contentions had ceased, but a contest over principles was succeeded by a contest over individuals, and personal animosities were rife in this so-called "era of good feeling." The election of 1824 has been called the "scrub race" for the Presidency. There were seventeen candidates and four of them—Jackson, Adams, Crawford, and Clay—received votes in the Electoral College. The issues were *men* rather than *principles*, and a deplorable scramble resulted, in the course of which Mr. Jackson expressed his opinion of Mr. Adams and Mr. Clay in terms more forcible than elegant.

Undoubtedly the most picturesque character of this period was the eccentric John Randolph of Roanoke. He was peculiar both mentally and physically. A Charleston bookseller put on record a description of his personal appearance in 1796, when he was approaching his majority—a description, by the way, which he never really outgrew. He

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was described as a "tall, gawky-looking, flaxen-haired stripling, apparently of the age from sixteen to eighteen, with a complexion of a good parchment color, beardless chin, and as much assumed self-confidence as any two-footed animal I ever saw." Randolph, although a freak in some ways, was a man of real genius, a hard hitter, a good fighter, and remarkably effective in his public utterances. His sarcasm cut like acid, and his bold statements and unconventional phrases startled his audiences. When under the influence of liquor he was dashing, brilliant, and vitriolic. Under arid conditions he was much less interesting. He was quite impartial, too, in the bestowal of his rhetorical attentions. Practically all the leading public men of the time experienced one or more of his classic flagellations. Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, Clay, and the two Adamses felt the sting of his whip-lash rhetoric on more than one occasion. For thirty years he availed himself of every opportunity to castigate the two Adamses, John and John Quincy. "The cub," said he, "is a greater

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bear than the old one." Whether sober or intoxicated, or in a state of semi-saturation, his invective was copious, continuous, and vehement, when devoting himself to these two New Englanders. Sometimes he couched his ideas in polished, stilted sentences with an Addisonian suggestion and again he employed phrases and comparisons reeking with vulgarity. In 1826 Randolph paid his respects to John Quincy Adams and his Secretary of State, Henry Clay, in a speech which, it was said, "exhausted the unrivalled resources of his vocabulary." "I was defeated," he exclaimed, "horse, foot, and dragoons,—cut up and clean broken down by the coalition of Blifil and Black George,—by the combination, unheard of till then, of the Puritan with the blackleg." He then took Mr. Clay's ancestors to task for bringing into the world "this being, so brilliant yet so corrupt, which, like rotten mackerel by moonlight, shined and stunk." President Adams retorted by applying to Randolph the lines of Ovid in which the poet draws a picture of Envy:

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His face is livid, gaunt his whole body;  
His breast is green with gall; his tongue drips  
poison.

And all this, let it be remembered, was in the  
“era of good feeling.”

It should not be thought, however, that John Randolph was a mere peddler of billingsgate. He was really a man of ability and influence, and notwithstanding his pitch-fork tendencies did have some lucid intervals and was not always indecent. He was a peculiar compound. He had some of the vulgarity of a river boatman, a genius for wordcraft similar to that of the late John J. Ingalls, and a dash of the brilliant meanness of Roscoe Conkling.

It is noticeable also that the “hurrah element” so prominent in the campaigns of a generation or two ago now serves, when it appears, only to provoke mirth and laughter. For sheer froth and nonsense the campaign of 1840 is without a parallel in our history. When the Whigs nominated General Harrison for the Presidency, an eastern paper spoke contemptuously of him and advised him not to



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aspire to that high office but to go back to his log cabin and drink his hard cider in an environment of coon skins. Almost by common consent the log cabin, the coon skin, and the cider cask became the Whig emblems of the campaign. Carl Schurz remarks in his *Life of Henry Clay*: "There has probably never been a presidential campaign of more enthusiasm and less thought than the Whig campaign of 1840. As soon as it was fairly started, it resolved itself into a popular frolic. There was no end of monster mass meetings, with log cabins, raccoons, and hard cider. One half of the American people seemed to have stopped work to march in processions behind brass bands or drum and fife, to attend huge picnics, and to sing campaign doggerel about 'Tippecanoe and Tyler too.' The array of speakers on the Whig side was most imposing: Clay, Webster, Corwin, Ewing, Clayton, Preston, Choate, Wise, Reverdy Johnson, Everett, Prentiss, Thompson of Indiana, and a host of lesser lights. But the immense multitudes gathered at the meetings came to be amused,

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not to be instructed. They met, not to think and deliberate, but to laugh and shout and sing."

Some of the speakers did attempt to discuss serious matters in a serious way, but it was difficult, if not impossible, to do so in the midst of such surroundings. A Whig speech of 1840 to be in harmony with its setting should read about as follows: "Fellow citizens: We are gathered together on a memorable occasion. We are surrounded by the revered emblems of our nationality. The flag of our country floats over our heads, the cider from our orchards flows at our feet, and the log cabin with its door covered with coon skins stares us in the face. The Whig party presents to you a candidate who stands as the living embodiment of these national emblems. We hold that any man who spent his boyhood days in an American log cabin is fit to grace the White House at Washington. We also hold that any man who has sipped the cider from our hillsides is abundantly able to quaff the champagne of the presidential mansion;

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and this after all, fellow citizens, is the main duty of our chief executive. It is also no small recommendation, my friends, that the Whig candidate is able to skin a coon with neatness and dispatch and to nail the pelt, well stretched, to his lowly cabin door. As it has been said by some one, if you allow me to write the songs of the nation, I care not who makes the laws, so I say, if you allow me to skin the coons of the nation I care not who formulates her statutes. I am aware of the fact, fellow citizens, that the chief executive of this nation is sometimes called upon to appoint a Cabinet, to give his sanction to legislation, to negotiate a treaty, or to direct the movements of the army or navy, but I prefer in my remarks to-day to say nothing of these things, but to confine myself to essentials. It is upon this platform, fellow citizens, that the Whig party makes its appeal for the suffrage of a sovereign and enlightened people."

The most effective campaign orator of this period was Thomas Corwin, of Ohio, better known as "Tom" Corwin. Indeed it would be

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difficult to imagine a combination of talents better adapted to campaign speaking than were those of Corwin. The testimony of men who knew and heard him repeatedly is all to this effect. Hugh McCulloch in his *Men and Measures of Half a Century* says of Corwin: "Men would travel twenty or thirty miles to listen to the matchless orator, and even his political opponents could not help joining in the applause which his speeches never failed to call forth. It was worth a Sabbath day's journey to hear 'Tom' Corwin tell a story. . . . He had always something good to say, and he never failed to be instructive as well as fascinating. His power over popular and promiscuous assemblies was immense. Plain farmers would not only travel long distances to hear him, but they would stand for hours under a burning sun or in a pelting rain, seemingly oblivious of everything but the speeches by which their attention was absorbed."

Corwin's oratory attracted attention in Congress as well as upon the stump. He was a member of the House of Representatives in

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1840, during the Harrison campaign, and added to his laurels by a memorable speech made in reply to General Crary of Michigan. General Crary had criticized the military tactics of General Harrison, and particularly his generalship in the Battle of Tippecanoe. This put Corwin on his mettle. He took the floor and made an inimitable speech, of which Mr. McCulloch speaks as follows: "In his off-hand reply to this speech Mr. Corwin gave free rein to the style in which he surpassed all men of his day. While he did not fail to vindicate Harrison's military capacity, as displayed in the battle, by apt references to the action of soldiers of acknowledged merit in somewhat similar circumstances, he overwhelmed his assailant with ridicule by showing what his opportunities had been for learning how battles should be fought. General Crary was a military general on a peace establishment. Taking advantage of this fact, Mr. Corwin described in his inimitable manner a Michigan militia parade with General Crary as the commanding figure; the troops

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in motion with hoes, axe-handles, and other deadly implements of war overshadowing the field; the general with his gaudy epaulets gleaming in the sun, mounted upon a crop-eared, bushy-tailed mare, fourteen hands high, riding gallantly in front, displaying the beauty of his steed and his superior horsemanship; and when the parade was over satisfying the thirst which his glorious labor has created with watermelons which he slashed with his mighty sword and shared with his heroic men. I recollect no speech so provocative of hearty laughter as this speech of Mr. Corwin. His exaggerated but somewhat truthful description of a military parade (general-training, it was called) in the early days of the West, in the conduct of which General Crary was supposed to have acquired the knowledge that fitted him to criticize General Harrison's military character, was so absolutely funny that the House was convulsed with merriment, and Democrats as well as Whigs shouted as he went on until they were hoarse. To such a speech there could be no answer. General

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Crary subsided. He was never heard again in the House or in public in Michigan. 'Slain by Corwin,' was the return of the inquest over his political remains."

The campaign of 1848 exemplifies another peculiarity in our campaign methods. In that year the Whigs nominated General Taylor for the Presidency upon the strength of his record in the Mexican War. Taylor at the time was not a Whig. He had never allied himself with any political party. In fact, he had never voted. In addition to this, he was such a novice in politics and statesmanship that even those who were most active in promoting his candidacy smiled at his guilelessness. His views on civil affairs were unknown. Indeed, it is fairly certain, in the light of subsequent developments, that he had no clearly defined views; yet he was preferred for the nomination to such men as McLean, Clayton, Clay, and Webster, and was moreover triumphantly elected. He was a great military hero and no questions were asked about his qualifications for the Presidency—

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an amiable weakness on the part of the American people which, it will be remembered, James Russell Lowell roundly satirized in the *Biglow Papers*. Lowell puts General Taylor's answers to certain questions in the quaint Yankee dialect of Hosea Biglow, "an up-country farmer."

About that darned Proviso matter  
I never hed a grain o' doubt,  
Nor I aint one my sense to scatter  
So'st no one couldn't pick it out;  
My love fer North an' South is equil,  
So I'll jest answer plump an' frank,  
No matter wut may be the sequil,—  
Yes, Sir, I am agin a Bank.

. . . . .

I don't appruve o' givin' pledges;  
You'd ough 'to leave a feller free,  
An' not go knockin' out the wedges  
To ketch his fingers in the tree;  
Pledges air awfle breachy cattle  
That preudunt farmers don't turn out,—  
Ez long'z the people git their rattle,  
Wut is there fer'm to grout about?

Mr. Lowell came to the conclusion that other candidates might have greater talents



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but that none could "set stiddier on the fence."

The press did not escape the sarcastic pen of Mr. Lowell. In "The Pious Editor's Creed," the pliable journalist bluntly announces his platform as follows:—

It aint by princerples nor men  
My preudunt course is steadied,—  
I scent wich way pays the best, an' then  
Go into it baldheaded.

The absurdity of the whole situation must have impressed the thoughtful men of the day. It is not at all likely that the campaign of 1848 could be repeated with success at the present time.

The main purpose of the preceding sketch is to show that the evolution of our campaign methods during the last century and a quarter presents some encouraging features. While the methods employed in some of the more recent political campaigns can hardly be called refined, they were, on the whole, an improvement upon those in vogue before the Civil War. The attitude of public men toward

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one another has been more fair and generous than in the days of John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson. There are, of course, some exceptions to this rule which will readily occur to the reader's mind. The most marked exception of recent years is to be found in the campaign of 1912, and more particularly in that part of it involving the two leading candidates for the Republican nomination. On the whole, however, the political discussions of recent years have centered around *principles* rather than *men*.

The attitude of the press, too, shows a marked improvement. The rabid party organ is disappearing, and the tendency is for the really great and influential dailies of the country to become independent in politics. From the standpoint of truth and fair-dealing in political discussion, the journalism of to-day still leaves much to be desired, and yet it marks a distinct advance over the journalism of a generation ago. And again, it requires the exception to prove the rule. The so-called Mexican disclosures, reflecting

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upon the characters of four United States Senators and published late in 1927, were quite unworthy of American journalism. Sensationalism leads to the most absurd lengths.

Again, the political fortunes of men are no longer made or unmade by mere incidents. Non-essentials are no longer as influential as they once were. Torch-lights, log-cabins, coon skins, hard cider, umbrellas, canes, bandannas, high hats, fence rails, watermelons, dinner pails, and blue jeans, are no longer the deciding factors in American political campaigns. Neither are the people likely to be carried away by catch-words, such as "Tippecanoe and Tyler too," "Rum, Romanism and Rebellion," "54-40 or Fight," and "The Full Dinner Pail." One President rode triumphantly into office upon the euphonious couplet:

Hurrah for Polk and Annexation,  
Down with Clay and high Taxation,

but it is not at all likely that another could be elected in a similar way.

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While, on the whole, then, it would appear that the methods of the American political campaign have greatly improved in recent years, it must be admitted that the campaign of 1912 had many regrettable features. There was a marked dip in the curve of progress; such, however, is the way in which civilization makes its advances.

In the first place, there was never a more bitter contest for the presidential nomination than the one between President Taft and Mr. Roosevelt in 1912. Mr. Roosevelt, with his characteristic determination and tremendous energy, "carried the war into Africa," and the President, apparently, felt compelled to adopt a similar kind of warfare. During the campaign, both before and after the Chicago Convention, the President did many things which must have been exceedingly distasteful to him. A campaign mapped out by "practical" politicians will inevitably contain many features which cannot commend themselves to a man of dignity and self-respect. A President of the United States, hurrying from city

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to city and from State to State, soliciting votes from the platform of a passenger coach, is not an edifying spectacle.

The White House should be the official residence of the chief executive and not his political headquarters. The President's Secretary, whose salary is paid out of the public funds, should give his time and energy to the affairs of government rather than to the political interests of his chief. Presidents, Vice-Presidents, Cabinet members, Speakers, Senators, Representatives, and State Governors, should be compelled by public opinion, if not by their own sense of the proprieties of the case, to give their first and best efforts to the duties of their respective offices rather than to a pursuit of the Presidency.

A fitting degree of dignity can never attach to the Presidency of the United States so long as that office is made the object of a general scramble. The campaign of 1912, and more particularly the campaign for the Republican nomination, humiliated us in the eyes of European critics. Never in recent years

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has there been such a regrettable campaign, and it is the part of wisdom, now that it is all over, to profit by the experience thus gained.

There are some indications that we are going to do this. During his campaigns President Wilson gave evidence of a high conception of the proprieties of politics and conducted himself in a most dignified and becoming manner. The same is true of his successors in office. Some of their supporters, however, were not so fastidious about the matter and the partisan press, under cover of anonymity, got in a few "dirty digs" and lent itself, as usual, to the misrepresentation of issues.

Public opinion is more alert in regard to the ethics of the campaign than formerly. The attempt to amend the Constitution so as to provide for a single term of six years for the President is one of the concrete results of this awakened sentiment. The first term has too often been used to pave the way for a second. Patronage has been dispensed and Southern delegates "nursed" with an eye single to this end. The "Six-Year Term"

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amendment is illogical. In theory a President should serve as long as the people care to re-elect him, but in practice the reëligibility feature has worked badly. I sincerely hope that the amendment will eventually be adopted; but that, when it is, it will not be made retroactive. Even if the attempt should fail, its effect upon public opinion will be salutary.

A few other changes would also be helpful. If national nominating conventions are to continue to exist, they should be revised and reconstructed on a more equitable and truly representative basis. Sections of the country giving little or no support to a political party should have slight representation in the national councils of that party. The powers of the National Committee should also be reviewed. A body of men elected to-day as the result of more or less political manipulation should not be able, by means of technicalities of procedure, to thwart the wishes of a majority of the party four years hence. Then again, definite and thorough-going presidential preference primary laws should be

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passed in all the States, and the primaries for all parties should be held on the same day and under exacting restrictions. All these things would tend toward greater dignity and equity in our campaign methods.

The campaign of 1916 has also taught us, I hope, that no party can succeed, however worthy and able its candidate, which does not put forth a definite and constructive program. A campaign based largely on destructive criticism is not attractive. It is out of date and not in harmony with present day progress and ideals. The time will come also when the word "available" will lose its peculiar and technical meaning. A noted American publicist is said to have remarked to his friends who urged him to become a candidate for the Presidency, "Gentlemen, let there be no mistake. I should make a good President, but a very bad candidate." This differentiation between the candidate and the President will not always obtain.





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